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THE MIGHTY FRIEND

PIERRE L'ERMITE

1. No subject

THE MIGHTY FRIEND

"The poor little maid sat down on the floor and sobbed"
—*Page* 573

THE MIGHTY FRIEND

A MODERN ROMANCE
OF LABOR-WARFARE, COUNTRY-LIFE
AND LOVE

CROWNED BY THE FRENCH ACADEMY

BY

PIERRE L'ERMITE

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION BY JOHN HANNON

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THE MIGHTY FRIEND

CHAPTER I

Cabourg, Villa des Cocotiers.

To Mademoiselle Léonce Dureuilles,
17, Plaine Monceau, Paris.

My Dear Girl:

My hand yet quivers with the clutch of the sword-hilt as I write to you.

I have just been inflicting the death-penalty.

I have discharged, *without* notice, my *seventh* maid!

Next, please! I never felt fitter in my life.

Of course you guess why I am writing. You *must* find me another maid—and a *treasure*—and at once. I don't fancy the risks of trying to do my own hair, or getting double congestion of the lungs by buttoning my own boots!

Wherefore, if you are a friend—and I fancy you are—take the field, and your bicycle, or jump into a cab and open the campaign. Off with you to Rue Duguay-Trouin, Rue de Vaugirard, 233, Rue Lafayette, Rue de Clichy—break down as many horses as you like, but don't stop till you find me a *pearl!*

Received 6 February, 1900

I want her to be lively, pretty, young, dark, distinguished and devoted to me to the verge—but not over the frontiers of indiscretion; at a pinch she may steal from me, but not too much. To the best of your power choose nothing *churchy*. Still, if she is perfect in other respects, I'll wink at a six o'clock Mass on Sunday morning, provided she doesn't bring back a dying-duck cast of features and a poisonous reek of incense. Do you get the general drift of my meaning?

That little baggage of a Juliette suited me admirably, but just imagine, I met her at the races wearing my latest hat, along with a Guardsman!

The Guardsman didn't matter, but *my* hat! As you can realize, I was appalled!

Worthy Léopold in the Faubourg St. Honoré had assured me he *never* duplicated my models for another customer, and so I was sure of having a hat of my own, for my very own self, and of running no risk of getting mixed up with shopkeepers' daughters paying four francs fifty to ten francs ninety.

On the day I mean, I was undecided; the sky was dull and the barometer at "Changeable"; to cut it short, I started in the victoria to do some shopping, wearing my Number *Two* hat.

On the way, the sky began to clear; I could see a patch of blue, big enough to be cut into a hussar's riding-breeches, so I told Baptiste to turn round and drive to the races quick, and drop me near the weighing-room.

My dear, I hadn't even stepped down before I caught sight of a small person in front, with her back turned to me, and looking—will you believe me!—very smart in a hat which was a perfect copy of mine—of my famous Number *One,* which I hadn't dared to bring out.

You can understand that being behind I didn't push forward to get a front look; I just studied the felt shape, the cut, and the trimmings.

Absolutely like mine! It was just the pretty little thing—the rich little, flyaway, ravishing thing that—on my black hair—produced the effects you know! You see, I am always so modest! Still, looking-glasses were not made *merely* for the convenience of jewellers' shop-windows. Wherefore, I repeat, the hat was exactly like mine.

Ah! that scamp of a Léopold, who made me pay 250 francs for a replica! Already I beheld in fancy the uncommonly stiff little letter I meant to turn out for him.

However, I wanted the satisfaction of a good stare at the person who showed such good taste.

I went in front of her, wondering whether the head matched the hat or not. And then I was fairly stunned when I saw it was Juliette, the little wretch! . . .

Ah, it was soon over. She didn't even come back to the fiat. Afterward I was nearly sorry for her. She was perfect, that little maid of mine, and with such a *nerve!* However, the deed is done.

Besides all this, I have been going through an unspeakably nerve-racking period this last fortnight. Just fancy, my dear, *we*—but try to guess: I'll give you a hundred tries—a thousand—ten thousand—but no, poor pet, you would never, never guess it. Would you like to know? *We are leaving Paris!* Yes, in order to go and be potted out like pumpkins in a hole called the Vale of Api. Do you know that rabbit-burrow? It is hardly the Val André!

How many disasters, eh, in these four words: *We are leaving Paris*—leaving the City of Dreams, the Paradise of Women, the Fatherland of all Big Department Stores, the only place where there is taste for dress, and tasteful dressing, and the only place where people can *eat?*

For example, we have just been traveling. Swiss cookery is all stonemasonry, and Italian all sour cabbage; Spain is at any rate candid,

and calls a fillet of beef "cow's flesh" on the menu: *"carne de vaca!"*

Paris, I repeat, Paris is the one place for *everything*. Good-by, those delightful four-o'clock gatherings at Chiboust's, where we gorged on delightful biscuits! Good-by the hallowed asphalt from the Opéra to the Madeleine! Good-by, the evening parties for French guests, and the thousand delicious, spicy little bits of scandal heard over the teacups at a *Five o'clock* gathering.

That is all over and done with—vanished! Why?

In order to make money.

I think I can hear you say from here, old darling: "But you've *got* money, and by the shovelful!"

Yes, but it appears, father says, that it isn't enough. Times are hard and beans are dear. The Five Per Cents are down to two and a half. The Frenchman, whom I love as an individual, but hate in the lump, is teasing and pestering his government. Consequently we must double our capital. To do this my people are launching out into a big industrial enterprise—the leather line, harness, boots—I'm not well up in it, but it seems that it is an Alaska! Papa is simply cracked about it.

"And you didn't rebel?" you will say to me.

I should think I *did.* I got up ten Revolutions in two months, and was simply beaten hollow!

My people hold the money, and they hold it well. It is flung to me without stint for my expenses, but the beggars refuse me one sou of capital. What's the result? They pay, and I must follow them.

One tiny little hope, however, shines like a sanctuary-lamp in the huge darkened nave of my heart, as Confucius might say! It is a hope to which I am clinging, as the imbecile, shipwrecked individual clutches at—a blade of grass.

Are the inhabitants of the Vale of Api inconceivable idiots or are they *not?* It comes to that.

I'll explain. Our factories will be built in the valley only on condition that the commune first of all sanctions the erection of engineering works for the railway people. Although you are not in the same boat with ourselves, you will readily understand that the authors of my being are far too business-like to start a new industry in a place without sufficient means of communication. These means will be supplied without demur by the Northern Line, if the Vale of Api sanctions the new railway sheds.

Now it appears that the Town Councillors

of that awful hole are so—so *countrified* that they are making difficulties about giving consent. Their hesitations will save me a year, and—between this and then—I'll get married.

Wherefore, fond lassie mine, rescue me—become a Newfoundland dog to your Alberta. Besides a maid, find me a husband, a fair-haired one, and quickly. I shall be frightfully grateful to both of you, and will grant you both a perpetual lease of my heart!

It is understood, then: a maid and a husband, or a husband and a maid. Go—run—fly—and avenge us.

With affectionate kisses, darling, from

ALBERTA.

CHAPTER II

Aboard the "Eglantine."

TO MADEMOISELLE JEANNE DE LA FERLANDIÈRE, LA FERLANDIÈRE BY THE VALE OF API, FRANCE.

My kind, great friend:

HERE I am, writing again to you. Oh, do not thank me. I am writing, you see, *because I must write to you.* My heart is full, and overbrimming.

I wish you were here, close beside me, my arm

in yours. We would chat together without need of the spoken word, just gazing far out on the sea, so blue beneath the dazzling sky. We would make a fine picture; something, you know, like the one in the Louvre, *St. Monica and St. Augustine;* with this difference, however: *they* are ever gazing upward, whereas we two would find it very hard not to lower our eyes at times to the wondrous work of the bewilderingly great Artist.

Oh, Jeanne, how beautiful is the sight before me as I write you this, and how infinitely great God is.

I shall surprise you, and you will think me a complex little thing, but there are moments when, confronting all these splendors, I experience, quite simply and naturally, a desire and even a yearning to die.

It seems to me that my soul is reaching that moment which must be unique in life, when our whole, entire being attains its *utmost* limit of ideal enjoyment, and, like Peter on Thabor, I find it a weary, a sad, an appalling thing to come down from the mountain again.

My cabin, where I am writing to you, is all rosy and white—the colours of a smile. The sides of our yacht are lacquered white, with golden lines, and the sea is lapping them with azure and emerald, while the multitudinous

lullaby she croons makes one drowsy, without a will to resist—it makes stipple-work of one's thoughts, and fills the brain with dream-pictures, done in dancing motes and sunbeams, of smiles and sunshine, contrasts and memories, hopes and regrets, beauty and tenderness unsatiated.

Yes, I would like to have you aft here, sitting close beside me, lulled in the breathless purring of the silvery cascade churned up by the propeller. I think that all these things around me would have an added ideal beauty were I sure to find remembrance of them this winter deep down in your dear eyes, and well nigh buried in your soul.

And now—I think I understand your brother better. I, too, am made serious, and almost sad, by the sights of nature. How many eyes have seen what I see, and loved what I love, and admired what I admire, and then been closed to these beauties for evermore!

Up *there,* have they opened upon splendors that will never pass away? Oh, the heartrending question! Do you recollect the pretty ballad you used to accompany for me in the Vale last year?

"On earth our lilacs soon have died,
And songs of birds last but a day;
I dream of summers that abide
For aye—for aye."

I, too, am dreaming of beauties that abide—for aye. Unhappily—

"... Le monde est ainsi fait, loi suprême et funeste,
Comme l'ombre d'un songe, au bout de peu d'instants,
Ce qui charme s'en va; ce qui peine... nous reste!
La rose vit une heure, et le cyprès... cent ans!"*

I can hear you say: "Oh, how Italy is exalting this Odile!" But think, my dear, I am distrustful of a certain keenness of feeling in *artificial* surroundings, and I have a clear memory of a debatable kind of piety once produced in me, to the tune of certain popular hymns—still more open to discussion. But *here* I am in the presence of the *reality* of things, and it is while confronting the blue waves, beneath a sky beaming with light and splendor, and feeling myself steeped in radiance, harmony, and sweet odors, that I also, poor little thing, stammer out my wretched prayer, lost in the mighty hymn ascending from creature to Creator.

When I return I shall show you my drawings, water-colors, and photographs, but what I shall not be able to bring you—to make you realize—is the bright sun, the great sound of the sea, the melodies of the wind through the trees along the coast. This voyage has per-

*"Such is the world, by law supreme and fateful! Like the shadow of a dream, when some moments have sped, whatso is pleasing departs, whatso is painful abides. The rose lives an hour, the cypress—a hundred years!"

fected my whole being; I see, I hear, I experience for the first time a thousand unexpected things. The unknown is without its secrets; the infinite has its limits, which are sweet and easy to attain.

And all this is going to end! One page more written down in my life; a few miles, a few hours, and we are at Nice, then at Marseilles—and at Paris! The blue leaf is turned over, and the gray leaf appears.

Paris! If you knew how utterly out of keeping the evocation of that hateful ghost is with the scenery amid which I write—something like a far-away tune from the Hôtel de Ville ball, heard during a rêverie of Saint-Saëns—like a Louvre rug hung up in a blue sky—like a newsboy's howl: "Paris Sport!" breaking out in the majestic concert of vast and tranquil nature.

Happily I am going through the capital without stopping. "To live happily, let us live hidden." And within eight days I shall be in the Vale of Api, nestling down in a corner of your friendship; enjoying the sunshine of the heart after that of nature.

Tell Marie to get everything ready at home, to open the windows, air the house, take the wrappings off the furniture, fill the vases with flowers, and make the beds; let the sun come in to bathe everything in his living light, so that,

on Saturday, when I go up the Abbaye steps, I may inhale the sweet fragrance of *home*.

I shall arrive about six o'clock. The horses will be done up, and I shall probably not go on to La Ferlandière; but if the good steed Germinal be back from grass, and if Jacques allows you, like a fair fly-by-night, to ride "the father of the family's horse," then come and say good-evening to me; the road is so fine between the Abbaye and La Ferlandière! Happily so, because this autumn we shall very often linger along it. You may even tell your brother Jacques to lay in good store of patience, because this year, far more than last, he will have to "put the police on our track" for tramping up and down by the famous Separation Tree, unable to leave each other. I feel already on my shoulders the responsibility of all our coming colds!

Till soon, then. Be joyful, because in five weeks I have hoarded up happiness enough for ten years! We shall relish it in the cosy home-life of the long winter evenings, by a roaring fire, far away from the crowd.

Tell M. le Curé he may count upon me to play on Sunday. He shall have some Craveggia chimes: *sol mi do; do do re mi do.*

It is an end "for good" this time. Good-by, my sweet and light-giving Jeanne; give greet-

"A duel began between these two men, representing the two camps in the Council."—*Page* 24

ing to the Vale for me; it also has its beauty, the grave and melancholy beauty of woods and valleys; I love its solitude and its silence, but above all I love—do you know whom?

I love—it's Jeanne.

P.S.: We have put in at Genoa, and picked up our mail. My aunt has just opened your brother's letter. It is dreadful! We thought the question of factories was dead and buried since the Council meeting at Easter. Oh, please tell Jacques that we count on him to fight to the last in defense of our native place against the Jewish factory folk! Our Vale full of factory buildings and foreigners—our roads broken up—our splendid fish-ponds drained away—our countryside turned into a Saint-Denis, a Creil, or a Saint-Ouen—ugh! Do you see, everything has to be paid for. I was too joyful in the first pages of my letter. If you are ever happy to the point of saying that you are—beware! Woe is at your gates.

Yours very sadly—and I shall put up a prayer to God for Jacques when he goes to fight for us down there. Wire me the result in Paris.

In Paris?

It will be bad news, then!

Your poor

ODILE.

CHAPTER III

AT TWO o'clock in the afternoon of that Sunday, August 30th, the Town Council of the Vale of Api, the prosperous Commune situate at the apex of the triangle formed, between Noyon and Chauny, by the meeting of the rivers Oise and Jouine, held a session amid the greatest public excitement.

First of all, the heat was tropical; the implacable sun was burning everything in the square before the mayoralty, the air seemed to dance in the hot waves sent up by the dazzling, dusty ground; the inhabitants, taking refuge along the house-fronts in the narrow strip of violet shadow, or sitting beneath the awning of the "Three Lads" inn, or smoke-hidden in the café called "The Cycle," were drinking glass after glass, their hats tilted back, their waistcoats gaping, and a general air of devastation upon their countenances—completely done up by the weather.

Indeed, the whole future of the district depended upon that Town Council sitting, and this was why the crowd of residents was so unusually large. Nothing, not even the delights of a mid-day nap, could keep the people indoors.

In a great city the Municipal Council may

argue one way or another—may vote for huge things like a Metropolitan Railway or a Paris Exhibition, but the community which it is *deemed* to represent is so enormous, and the ratepayer's facilities for changing his abode so great, that out of 100,000 householders, 95,000 take absolutely no interest in the meetings, or else are content, after a vote which is often a very serious matter, to cast reflections intended to be witty. That satisfies petty vanity, if it stops no leakage.

But in village life the question of the land and of the interests staked in it surpass exceedingly the joys of being funny. And so, despite the equatorial heat, the whole four hundred families of the Vale of Api were there beneath the windows awaiting the news of the meeting.

The Council room was small, and but very few principal members of the public had been enabled to squeeze in. The stuffy little hall contained, besides the Councillors, the leading people of the district: the landlords, the farmers, the doctor, the notary, the three wine-merchants, Soupot, the stout keeper of the "Cycle" café, and some others.

"Gentlemen," said the mayor, after clearing his throat a little, to give himself courage, "we have to bring to a conclusion to-day our discussion of a question of vital importance—a

question we have considered for months, and to which an absolutely definite reply is demanded of us to-night."

Here the chairs were drawn up, and necks were craned and eager faces thrust forward over the notary's shining pate, the doctor's fly-away topknot, and the café-keeper's wolfish poll, toward the speaker, who continued:

"As you are aware, the Northern Railway Company, for the last time, offers our peaceful commune——"

"Too peaceful," droned the café-keeper's bassoon-like voice.

"——peaceful commune," pursued the mayor, a worthy farmer, bent upon driving a straight line of thought, as of old a straight furrow, through all interruptions—"the Northern Railway, I say, offers us a locomotive depot and five factories. The erection of engine-houses involves a Government purchase of land to the value of several hundred thousands of francs; the five factories, which are concerned with private industrial enterprise, will bring into the Vale twelve hundred factory-hands——"

As the café-keeper here thumped the floor with his stick in token of approval, the mayor interpolated:

"I am not appraising the situation, I am

merely stating the facts, and I ask the Council to be good enough to decide, with the greatest circumspectness, and with the greatest calm, upon a question the gravity of which is clear to all—the best proof of which is that everybody in the place is outside there below awaiting your decision."

Thereupon the mayor sat down, and mopped away the results of heat and emotion with his handkerchief, while for a long, whole minute there fell upon this poor little village assembly room a genuinely impressive silence.

In the life of the individual as in that of the community there are certain solemn hours, when everything points one way *or* another, the two courses being diametrically opposed to each other. It seems as though one were setting sail for either happiness or adversity, without chance of a middle course.

The Vale was reaching such an hour, and all the farmers present, close-shaven men, with russet-brown, sunburned faces, looked at each other hesitantly, like soldiers before firing the first shot.

The Council, however, contained one member who was not long restrained by this feeling. Soupot, the café-owner, popped up like a jack-in-the-box, and was first to break the silence:

"Twelve hundred men to eat and drink in a district," he said. "Twelve hundred men to draw money from the company and spend it in the Vale. Why, as for me, I say it's a fortune for our town, and that people must be mad not to agree to it." And he sat down with an air of defiance, as if to terrorize the opposition.

"It depends," replied very calmly the youngest of the Councillors present, Jacques de la Ferlandière, a tall, handsome, strapping fellow of fearless eyes, and a land-owner, as every one knew.

"It *doesn't* depend! It's as clear as the sun that's roasting us. Do two and two make four?"

"I believe so."

"Well, then, twelve hundred men, not to count their wives and youngsters, every grown man of them dropping a hundred and fifty francs a month in the district—for my part, I say it's a Klondike. Besides, multiply—if you know the multiplication table!"

Jacques de la Ferlandière detested the café-keeper. He might have replied, "Yes, I know multiplication, as is proved by the fact that all around the fifty hectares of land my father left I have trebled my property by buying half the Neigerie estate, and all the fields bordering on the Bois Roux, and—what is more—I have

paid for them, which gives me the advantage of you, because you still owe me two thousand francs for cider-apples."

But the young squire was a silent man; the fields had taught him to hold his peace, and so, without losing time breaking lances with a talkative man more accustomed to breaking bottles, he addressed his remarks to the mayor:

"Listen, Etienne," he said. "You know as well as I that wealth in hard cash is not the only good thing in a country, by a very long way."

"Certainly, there is the land." And the mayor pronounced the words *"The Land"* with a sort of religious gravity.

"Very well, but you thick-headed potato-eaters, your fields—why, they will have six times the value when the Government begins buying!" cried Soupot, his face apoplectically flushed already.

"First of all, it depends on *what* fields," resumed Jacques. "The ground meant for the station and the storage-depots will be compulsorily purchased by a regular Government Commission, accustomed to that class of purchase, and it is idle to think of throwing dust in their eyes."

"Yes, but how about the fields belonging to private individuals, and plots of ground in the

town and outlying hamlets that will be wanted for the big shoe and leather works? They will be bought up separately, for a certainty. And then you can make the factory-owners come to any earthly terms."

"Oh, so far as I am personally concerned," replied Jacques, "I fully intend not to make them come anywhere!"

Thereupon a duel began between these two men, representing the two camps in the Council. Thrusts and parries were exchanged, cutting on the one side, thunder-laden on the other, somewhat like the play of a fine rapier clashing hopelessly against a fire-shovel. Quite manifestly, whole arrears of hatred were being paid up.

Soupot, no longer controlling his ingrained enmity, stared the young gentleman-farmer full in the face, and folded his arms in a gesture of supreme and disdainful commiseration.

"You won't help to run the price up? But who are you in the district? You have ground, but you are penniless. You own La Ferlandière, a stack of bricks in the bottom of a marsh. Whether you run the price up or do not run it up, what does it matter to us? Besides, up to the present you're the only man to speak in the Council."

"What about yourself?" interposed the mayor.

"For myself, I say it's madness to pass alongside of Fortune without giving her a chair and saying, 'Sit down, ma'am.'"

"I even add," put in Jacques, stroking his fair beard ironically, "that if I were in M. Soupot's position I would talk just like him. The more inhabitants there are in the district, the more absinthe will be drunk. Am I not right, *Monsieur* Soupot?"

"Obviously," exclaimed the café-keeper, without the least respect for his neighbors or their opinion of him.

"Yes, only everybody here is not a café-keeper. As a matter of fact, there is only one."

"*Fortunately,* I suppose you mean," sneered Soupot, with mischievous, bloodshot eyes. "Go ahead! Don't be bashful, speak out; have at least the straightforwardness of your opinion."

"You are mistaken; I would prefer to see several of you, because if there were two or three of your trade, perhaps you might ruin one another. There, you see, I am showing you my cards."

"Are your cider-apples getting on your nerves?"

"On the contrary, *Monsieur* Soupot! I wouldn't have begun on it, but since you have

started that chapter, I may now continue it. Supposing that, above all things, I wanted my apples paid for, I would support the company's proposals with all my might, in order to make you gain a lot of money——"

"It doesn't prove that I'd take it *your* way," broke in Soupot, with a loud laugh.

"That is possible—and even probable. But I will not, for one second, take up my position at this purely personal point of view; I only think that your tavern is not the whole district."

"It always counts for more than your Ferlandière!"

"That again depends on the point of view."

"In any case—" and Soupot's voice took on a coarser intonation—"I have the right of talking louder here than you, for I am not alone!"

A murmur of approval was heard in some parts of the hall, and Jacques rose to his feet.

"Nor am I," he said. "I also am not alone. I have at my back all the farmers, all the peaceable inhabitants, all the true country-born households——"

"And the priest!" yelped two or three voices.

"The Curé? Why, certainly, and the Sisters also. I thank the Council for affording me an opportunity of saying so publicly. Don't think that I'm the kind of man to be

ashamed of my friends! I have with me, I repeat, every hearth and home in the Vale of Api, all the old neighbors——"

"Good-for-nothing old frumps!"

"There's good in them," retorted one of the farmers.

"Not for me," cried Soupot. "They don't lift their elbow like the new generation, the lads that want the factory. And not only do they want it, but they'll get it!"

"Exactly! Hear, hear! Long live Soupot!"

Thereupon a whole group lined up together; the doctor and some property-owners down for the day from Paris, whose sons, in loud cycling suits, began lustily to applaud the café-keeper's words.

The mayor was vexed.

"Members of the Council *only* are allowed to speak here," he said. "If the proceedings are interrupted I shall have the hall cleared."

The meeting continued in what was now one splurge of talk. All the fine speech-makers belonged to the group favoring the factories.

The farmers could only get angry, shrug their shoulders, and hammer the floor with their walking-sticks. If they had been asked to prove that two and two make four, they would have been wholly at a loss. They felt, they saw that a grievous thing was being done—

that the territory cleared, cultivated, and made valuable by their forebears was about to slip piecemeal from their hands, and belong to Paris bagmen, thenceforth the masters of the place; that the increment value of the soil, acquired by years of observation and intelligent husbandry, was about to become a dead letter, a thing without use, a thing to be thoroughly laughed at. They were sure that a vote for the factories meant the disappearance of ancestral ways, which had given them happiness; and the setting of sail for a fluctuating, strange, and ceaselessly changing New World. They felt all that, and many other things besides.

But not one of these simple men durst open his mouth before all these callow young city men, with their impudent eyes, inexhaustible gabble, and sarcastic tempers, who would break the thread of the gravest argument with what passed for a joke.

Amid the general rout Jacques de la Ferlandière alone showed fight, and presented his calm, fine face to the sheer epilepsy of the other side—for Soupot's band, feeling that the decisive hour had come, were now talking and gesticulating all at once.

"If we don't vote for the factories the people will hoot us!" bawled the café-keeper.

"I deny that," replied Jacques firmly. "I belong to the neighborhood myself, and so did my father and all his people before him. You, *Monsieur* Soupot, are a newcomer, and a stranger."

"But after all, I hear how men talk in my café!"

"What you hear, and especially since last week, is the talk of the men on the street you have brought in to work up opinion."

"You could have done the same!"

"I haven't the same interest, and besides," Jacques added, with a certain grimace of disgust, "there are some jobs that I loathe."

"Leave them to us, then! Resign!"

"Never! I shall defend *our* land foot by foot against you all, because, after God, it is the mighty friend—this thing compacted of the dust, the remembrances, and the toils of our ancestors, which we cannot pull up and take away with us, as you, sir, can take away your beer-barrels and your bar!"

"Pooh! that's all sentiment!" said Soupot, his thick lip shooting out in huge disdain.

"As you please, but it is the sentiment out of which the Fatherland has been made!"

"Fatherland! You are behind the times, Monsieur de la Ferlandière!"

"I say further: if the Council allows itself to

be influenced; if it hands the locality over to foreign manufacturers; if, although enjoying tranquillity, comfort, and the decencies of life, it sacrifices them all for a hazardous, unknown future, at a moment when material progress and science are making human happiness bankrupt everywhere——"

At this point a retired business man interposed uneasily: "But, Monsieur Jacques, there are factories and factories; mills are not always homes of perdition! There are good factories. Come, now, admit that there are!"

Jacques halted a moment, while he sought scrupulously the exact expression of his thoughts.

"Yes, there are good factories, and it is very fortunate, because in our time the factory has become, for *certain* districts, an absolute necessity."

"Quite so," growled Soupot. "And what then?"

"There are good factories, but they are *rare;* the workman lost in a crowd of his mates is nearly always shy of showing his good qualities. Whereas human defects get placarded; they talk and shout, and embolden men by dint of contact with others."

"But how about quite close to us, at Roubaix?" persisted the merchant.

"There it is different. You have Christian employers there, interested in their men, and desirous of their real happiness—even should they be hated for it. Ah, if the factories proposed here were to be under *their* management —should the Vale of Api become another Val de Bois, I would have a sore heart—yes, I admit I would—at the thought of seeing so utterly transformed the whole framework of the future lives of our children; but I would say to myself: After all, let the land change, provided hearts remain the same."

"He talks like a Jesuit," spluttered the café-keeper. "And besides, that isn't all; it's getting on to absinthe-time, and we *must* make up our minds. The question is to find out whether or not the neighborhood is condemned to moldiness in perpetuity."

"No! You are putting the question wrong," replied Jacques, standing erect in the middle of the hall. "Not one of us wants moldiness, and I less than any one. If you come to La Ferlandière you would see there farming implements that are the last word in present-day inventive progress. Therefore I say once more, nobody wants moldiness. But do you want the putridity of Socialism, and of the anarchy that goes with it? It is the flower of to-morrow, growing upon ground sooty-black with your

factories! Now, then, stand up, and let the whole countryside know your names right well!"

"But I have already told you," persisted the little business man, holding completely by his idea, "and you yourself have acknowledged that there are excellent factories."

"Possibly, but I add that those you will establish here will be under Jewish management—you are well aware of the fact, all of you. Labor will be task-work there, and the laborer some sort of a unit, lost in the anonymity of the joint-stock capital."

Murmurs, almost growls of dissent arose nearly all around him.

"Yes," proceeded the young farmer, "I see it, your town of to-morrow, with its men, hoping nothing further for themselves and *by* themselves, men whose sole ambition shall be to get 'taken on' at the works! I see in advance the long line of place-cadgers, whereas every man here has now a place of his own, big and broad in God's sunlight. 'A place, a place!' That will be the cry of all these beggarmen of to-morrow! And how lovely our Vale of Api will be, with its streets deeply rutted by truck-wheels, its wretched little slums, its leprous walls, its sallow children, mudlarking in the gutters, amid cook-shops and café restaurants!"

"Here, I say, you!" protested Soupot, bounding to his feet.

"I see our pleasant river chokeful of waste-products, our countryside invaded by foreign workmen; our air befouled with smoke; our children deserting the villages and starting off to that accursed Paris! I entreat the Council to reflect yet once again, and not to take upon themselves so appalling a responsibility in regard to our tranquil countryside."

His voice found no echo; he saw, he felt, that everything had been pre-arranged. He was right, for the café-keeper, without one word of reply, requested the mayor to proceed to the vote immediately.

Voting was by folded slips, which were marked in absolute silence. When this had been done, every one began to comment in whispers on Jacques de la Ferlandière's attitude. "He speaks for himself," was said in one quarter. "He is not in the swim," was murmured in another. "The café-keeper went for him with more bluster." "It was the Abbé Hans who greased his paws and taught him his lesson. Besides, the *Jacquot* isn't a man; he's a priest!"

The votes had ere this been collected, and the mayor, standing up at the table, opened with a well-nigh quivering hand the Coun-

cillors' twelve bulletins. The result was as follows:

For the establishment of the factories. 8
Against 4

There was a fierce explosion of joy in the hall—stamping on the floor, jumping on the tables, hand-clapping, stick-thwacking, yelling, howling, calf-bleating, cock-crowing. Above all there was much leaning out of window to fling at the anxious, waiting crowd the red-hot news:

"La Ferlandière is beaten! The motion is carried. Hip, hip, hurrah!"

According to their opinions, some went to Soupot's and uproariously washed down the triumph of Progress, while others, like Jacques de la Ferlandière, fared sadly and thoughtfully homeward, along the high road, where the setting sun was already beginning to lengthen the gloomy shadows of the lofty poplars.

CHAPTER IV

ON LEAVING the Council, Jacques had shaken hands with a few in the crowd who came forward impetuously to thank him, and then gone on to the telegraph office to announce the

bad news to the lady travellers from the Abbaye. Thence he had made a détour to avoid the café where Soupot must now be christening the Cause at his customers' expense, and finally, taking a short cut through the Neigerie estate, regained the homeward road for La Ferlandière.

Never before had the long highway between his demesne and the Vale of Api seemed so short. In his then frame of mind he would have wished La Ferlandière far, very far away, deep in the heart of the woods. Were it there, he need not be an eye-witness of what was so soon to take place in the village.

However, he walked at a round pace, and in an hour's time the roofs of La Ferlandière showed amid the autumn foliage, already tinged here and there with the first russet hues.

The young Squire halted for a moment by the wide stretch of meadow-land forming the nearest section of his estate. In its center, his red plow-oxen lay amid the lush grass and

> "Pursued with languorous and splendid eyes
> The inward dream they never seemed to end."

Here, then, was his own land—his own trees—his own woods. The distant range of buildings, which seemed to overtop the oaks and bid him welcome from afar, had sheltered

all belonging to him since—since when? He himself could hardly say for certain. La Ferlandière, indeed, dated neither from the last century nor its predecessor. As far back as the peasants could go to awaken olden remembrances the Squire's inheritance figured among them as a sort of essential thing in the life of the countryside.

Jacques looked onward to where, caressed by the kindly sun, there glinted on the horizon what Soupot had just scornfully called "a brick-stack buried in a marsh." At thought of this a quick spasm of anger shook the young man's shoulders.

Doubtless, La Ferlandière was—and is—on the downward reach of the road from Saint Quentin to the Vale, but the surrounding coppice called the Bois Roux climbs the hillock so picturesquely, the homestead buildings are so agreeably grouped, the barn roofs gleam so ruddily against the somber verdure of the pines, the fish-ponds mirror back the sky with such deep and tranquil purity, that the demesne commands attention from every point of the road.

Moreover, the young Count had followed the traditions of his elders and left nothing undone to give farm and mansion all the comfort and cosiness procurable, in country life, by quite

modest means. Around the small park he had allowed the timber to grow in tall avenues of unpolled, natural height; the buildings comprising the residence (known in the neighborhood, with something of generosity, as the "Chateau") had been carefully overhauled every year, kept thoroughly in repair, and even much enlarged. The hundred and sixty arable hectares of firm clay soil and alluvial deposits had been skilfully drained and cropped, partly for intensive market-gardening purposes, partly to meet industrial demands. The sugar beetroot, counting a good fifth in the general crop rotation, had been brought to especial perfection by Jacques, who, as a matter of fact, had been one of the earliest opponents of the old routine that had eyes only for enormous beets. During the season his fields stretched out as far as the eye could reach in rows upon rows of little beetroots, deep in the earth and very full of sugar. If they made friend Soupot grin disdainfully, they delighted connoisseurs in the market.

While Jacques stood steeping himself in this vision of home, a gruff voice behind him asked suddenly:

"Cannot Monsieur le Comte find the path, then?"

Jacques turned around, to encounter the

postman, who had just reached the top of the rise, puffing, perspiring, and pushing his bicycle along.

"Oh, it is you, Sylvain!" he said.

"Yes, Monsieur Jacques, Sylvain Quattepanche in flesh and bone—especially flesh. And so, if you don't mind——"

Slyvain slewed his mail-bag around to the front, and then, groping in one pocket of it, drew out a bundle of letters and newspapers tied together apart from the rest, and handed them to Jacques.

"At any rate, you understand my game, *you* do, Monsieur Jacques!" said Sylvain.

"Give them here, then. Are you lazy to-day, that you don't want to go down to La Ferlandière? There is some sound light wine down there, all the same."

"Once upon a time there was."

"How do you mean, 'once upon a time'? It is always the same."

"I daresay it is, Monsieur Jacques, but see now, they keep me from enjoying it, they do—I mean them down beyond at the head office, with all their pestering about progress!"

This word "progress" found echo in the mood the Squire was in, and awakened, keen as ever, recollections of the Council meeting,

which had begun to be lulled by the distance, and the restful calm of things.

"What? Progress? But you are not going, I suppose, to say a word against Progress? Do you know, we are actually going to have factories, locomotive-sheds, leather works, shoe works? There will be works to suit every man's fancy."

"That's right. I've already met a dozen men boozed on the road."

"Sylvain! Why, my poor friend, you are an abominable reactionary," said Jacques with a little ironic smile. "There is even a frightful reek of the fagot—a strong suspicion of downright heresy—about you!"

"I'll say what I think right out. You know your light white wine? I'm a man made to appreciate it. I'm not known in these parts as Quattepanche,* I suppose, because I feed up on fresh spring water only. You follow me?"

"Perfectly. I am almost ahead of you."

"Well, down to last year there were four of us fellows to go the rounds in the Vale of Api—not one less."

"Four? You are exaggerating."

"Not a bit. I quote my authorities. There was Henri. He went the Frilleux round. Gigot did Bresollettes. Etienne had the Blanc-

*Quatte-panche=quatre-panse—a fourfold stomach.

Buisson round, as far as the Bois Roux—a famous walk, my word, right through the cuttings. And yours truly, Sylvain Quattepanche, here present, used to serve La Ferlandière, the Abbaye, Fumeçon, and the Neigerie, which was enough and to spare for my one hundred and eighty pounds weight.

"Now, during ten years, Monsieur Jacques, not once, I could take my oath on it—" and Quattepanche spat on the ground—"not once has there been a complaint. Winter and summer, every man of us went his round, regularly and quietly. It was 'Good morning,' 'good night.' I was friends with all. I had my drop of rum at the Abbey, and famous rum it was, too. I had my soup at the Hauts-Buttés, and about three o'clock I used to come back, as quiet as a lamb, and smoking a good churchwarden pipe along the roads. In the evening I did the gardening at the presbytery, and for that little job alone I got an extra 250 francs a year. It was too fine to last. Progress was bound to come."

"What! But you have a bicycle now, to cover the ground?"

"Let's talk about the bicycle, then. There it is, the ugly beast—saving your presence. The bicycle is all very nice in summer for Parisians who start out at what time they like

"They stared hard at Jacques de la Ferlandière."—*Page* 46

along roads of their own choosing. It is all right for swells who've got five-franc pieces ready for nothing else than patching up holes in their tires. But for me the bicycle is ruination."

"Oh, Quattepanche!"

"It's devastation!"

"You're piling it on."

"Well, then, see for yourself. One morning the postmaster sent for me and, 'Quattepanche, my friend,' he says, 'the Department is going to stand you a bicycle,' he says. 'Can it be possible?' I says, fair wonder-struck, like the fool I was. I made a jubilee of it, like a bit of a boy. Everything new is lovely. Isn't that right, Monsieur Jacques?"

"Go on."

"So I said to him, 'They'll stand me a good machine, I suppose?' 'A solidly built one, certainly,' he says, and there and then I was happy. I saw myself doing my quarter of a day's round quietly in one hour. Simple creature that I was! The governor went on to say: *'Only—'* 'Only what?' I says, feeling nervous all of a sudden. 'You'll undertake to do the work yourself,' he says. 'The work of my three mates?' I asks him. 'Yes,' he says. 'And the round from the Vale up to the Neigerie?' 'Certainly.' 'But it can't be done, sir!' 'Not with

legs, of course,' he says, 'but I tell you again, you're going to have a bicycle.'

"Well, then, Monsieur Jacques, you can guess how things went. I snorted. I jumped about like an old horse trying to kick over the traces. I said their bicycle would lose me three hundred francs a year and cost me four times as much in trouble—and at my time of life, too! All my arguments were reckoned foolishness, absolutely, just the same—saving your presence, Monsieur Jacques—as if I was wasting wind whistling into a fiddle. The governor said, with the style of a man that don't care which way it is, he said, 'Oh, you needn't jump up to the ceiling, you know. If you're not satisfied, leave it at that. Your three colleagues out of work just now will scramble for the job. I'm surprised, though, at your carrying on like this. I expected better behavior from you, Quattepanche, much better.' "

"Poor Sylvain!"

"Why, certainly, 'poor Sylvain'! Let us add up the sum: For one bicycle—one godsend—one progress—call it what you like, here are three men out of a situation, and the remaining man overworked, obliged to get around on a jigger that's no good three-quarters of the time. I mean in winter and spring, and hill-climbing, and along the high roads when they're just

macadamized; and the side roads, when they're wet and muddy, and through the lanes, where the wheels simply get glued to the ground."

"Perhaps your machine is soon the worse for wear?"

"The worse for wear? Monsieur Jacques! It's frightful! *Wear* out isn't the word. It fairly vanishes away, and the upkeep is at my expense. Every fortnight there's something wanted. Their old bicycle is as delicate as a young girl. One time it's a burst tire, another it's broken spokes, or a lamp nicked from me, or a chain to be replaced, without counting the nice little complaints of the gendarmes for scorching too fast, or grumbles from headquarters for going too slow! And then, I must say, there are accidents. I'd like to see them, the little gents who made the decision in their snug offices, with their feet on the fireplace—I'd like to see them on my famous machine, when it's raining, or the road's frozen over, or simply when it blows north or east across the Vale. Look here: when I go down to La Ferlandière, the wheels keep on the move, but when I leave the Jouine and turn at the corner of the Abbaye, I assure you, Monsieur Jacques, there are days when you wouldn't get forward yourself, it blows so hard from the Fumeçon side."

"It's a lucky thing that Mademoiselle gives you a glass of good rum, eh, poor Quattepanche?"

"I drink no more of Mademoiselle's rum!"

"Why so?"

"I get to the Abbaye at such an unearthly hour, about six in the morning. Everybody's still in bed, even the chambermaid. I'm always in a hurry, and always late; that's why I no longer go right down to La Ferlandière, in spite of your good white wine. And then, you understand, to drink when you're on the run, all bathed in perspiration—it's best not to. If it could only be said that the money my three mates used to earn did good to anybody in the district! But no, nothing of the kind. It is lodged away in the Government's reserve fund. There are three happy men the fewer, that's all. Well, well, and that's Progress! You'll see, Monsieur Jacques, how it will be with these factories. My little story of to-day will be the history of the whole district on a big scale to-morrow."

"Still, my poor Quattepanche," said M. de la Ferlandière, who had been listening to his own thoughts in this simple man's outburst, "progress must come."

"Yes, like old age—and like misfortune. It would be too fine to keep young always."

Jacques made no reply.

"You don't answer me?" said the postman.

"Look! Who are those people?" queried Jacques, pointing to a heavily loaded victoria coming along the high road. It was drawn, with much straining at the collar, by a pair of upstanding horses, which the Squire did not recognize—and he knew all the horses in the district, for the excellent reason that he bred the best part of them.

"Ah, that lot? Wait," said Quattepanche, blinking his little gray eyes under bristling brows.

The victoria drove slowly by, shaving the edge of the turf so close that the two men fell back from the footpath onto the grass. There were three black-coated individuals in it, corpulent, florid-faced men. In a corner seat, as though anxious to hide himself, was fat Soupot, gloved, pomaded, and wearing his very best suit.

The trio in the carriage were talking loudly. Suddenly the one of them seated on the near side stood up, and holding the hood to steady himself, pointed with his stick to the splendid La Ferlandière meadows, at the lower end of which, like some liquid sapphire in a cool emerald beaker, the Jouine flowed silently.

"Why, there's our place ready-made for us!" he said. "It couldn't be better. We might run up the skin-sheds on one bank, the workshops on the other, and the river would give the motive power. Victor, stand up and have a look. It would be ideal for turbines—a dream!"

Victor half stood up, and mumbled something.

When the two men sat down again, their eyes encountered Jacques' ironical gaze, smiling at them like some bearded Gaul.

The carriage drove on. Soupot must have hurriedly said a word or two then, because the three of them, with fussy precautions that broadened the Squire's smile, stood up together. Shielding their brows with their hands from the western sun, now stooping to kiss the world good-night, they stared hard at Jacques de la Ferlandière. But they did not make him lower his eyes.

"Is it the railway people?" he asked Quattepanche.

"No; that lot is a sample of the Jewish crew that's going to poison us."

"How so?"

"Go on, you know all about it."

"I know that the vote for the locomotive works involves almost to a certainty a shoe fac-

tory and tan-yards. Would it be those people already?"

"Already!" repeated Sylvain. "Why—but don't you know, then, that their plan of campaign was prepared six months ago? They didn't even take the trouble, or rather they hadn't the cheek, to be present at the Council meeting. They were in the beer-garden further down the street, waiting for the result of the vote, with their half-pints in their hands, and without a shadow of misgiving. Soupot has been steering them in these parts for a month, and, believe me if you like, his paws have been well greased. You will still have trout, you will, because you're up stream, but folks in the Vale can say good-by to theirs. It appears the Jouine is doomed to be poisoned already; for they do stink strong, their hides do, all of them!"

Jacques gazed at the victoria, now a small black dot diminishing in the distance. He focussed his eyes upon it with such intensity of expression that even Quattepanche was struck.

"What would you have, Monsieur Jacques?" he said. "They begin with the little ones and they end with the big ones. Yesterday it was me, poor Sylvain. To-morrow it will be you. It is progress, Progress!"

And the postman, covered in dust, set out for La Neigerie, his bicycle clanking along like an iron side-drum.

CHAPTER V

THE scene was kind old Dr. B——'s consulting room at the Maison-Dieu. The great physician was seated at his desk, and Odile, looking very graceful in her simple traveling-gown, was standing bolt upright before him.

"Well, then, my child," he said, "this famous voyage went off all right, did it?"

"Delightfully, Doctor! It was a dream! Something that never ought to end."

She closed her eyes as she spoke, her face lighting up as though she were beginning to live her Italian impressions all over again.

"But, then, why are we back so soon? It isn't much more than two months since you started?"

"Still, Doctor, one can't always gad about; there is home, you know, and you may be quite sure my aunt is glad to get back to her dear Abbaye."

"The fact is," began the physician—"well, now," he resumed, "you know me as a friend, an old family friend of yours. I understand perfectly well how very fond you must be of

"Odile . . . studied for some moments . . . her whole 'delicate' person."—*Page* 50

the Abbaye. When people own such a lovely place, with so many memories blossoming on the graves of their dead kindred there, it breaks their hearts if they don't live in the place always. Still, although it grieves me to be thus blunt and matter-of-fact, you must admit that your Abbaye is—damp."

"Oh, only in winter, Doctor."

"It will be winter to-morrow, my child. It is nearly so to-day. This morning, do you know, it was just *one* degree above freezing point, by my thermometer? That was here in the middle of Paris. If so, what about the Vale?"

"We make fires! Splendid big fires, stacked up with whole tree-trunks, in the great drawing-room fireplace. Wood is cheap down there, I assure you. By-the-by, would you like any? As it happens, our friend, M. de la Ferlandière, writes to-day that he is taking a lease of the whole copse called the Bois Roux this year."

"Believe me, my good Odile, nothing gives better warmth or light than God's sun. That is why, you great disobedient child, I should have liked you for this year—oh! only *this* year —to spend the whole winter south."

"On account of my poor little chest?"

"Why, no—your chest? no, not more for that than on account of—your nervous system—your general health. Admit, proud maiden,

that between the strength of, say a big bridge like the Pont Neuf and your strength there is a certain amount of difference. You are—what shall I say, for I must watch my words with a debater like you? You are more delicate—less solidly built than the Pont Neuf."

"For which reason," said Odile, laughing, "I take precautions—a whole crowd of precautions."

"You must be taking too many, my child, if you are taking enough of them. See now, in two or three years' time, when you get married, I would like to present the lucky rogue responsible for making my dear Odile a happy woman with a strong, well-set-up young wife—having plenty of red in her cheeks, and brown hands and supple limbs; able to go from her bedroom to the big drawing-room without chancing a cold, such as you occasionally catch, do you not, Mademoiselle?"

Here Odile went and stood laughingly before the mirror over the mantel, and studied for some moments her very light brown hair, her very blue eyes, her complexion, pale beneath its sun-brown, her over-white hands, her whole "delicate" person, as the doctor had put it. Then she pouted.

"There is certainly a margin!" she murmured, with an almost comic sigh.

"We shall fill it out!"

"Not *too* much, though."

The physician moved his hand as though to say, "Oh, my poor Odile, don't alarm yourself about *that.*"

The gesture somewhat worried the aunt, a kind old maiden lady of "days that are no more," with bright eyes and a face tranquil in its frame of white hair.

"Still, Doctor," she queried, "don't you think the great strain has been relieved since we passed through Paris before?"

"Oh, without a doubt," said the physician. "Change, travel, diverted attention—all these are excellent things for little nervous girls."

He then stood up, put his finger on Odile's brow, and said, in very fatherly tones:

"Only I want this little head not to work too hard. Above all things, it mustn't be made a paint-pot to mix black colors in."

"Why, who told you, Doctor?"

"My little finger, Odile. It tells me all your sins: going to bed after ten o'clock, taking coffee——"

"I no longer take coffee!"

"You are wise—dining out too often; spending ten times more effort on a thing than the thing requires—I know all about it. Ah, if I were your parish priest!"

"But I pay attention to you, too, Doctor, nearly as well as to M. le Curé."

"And you are right. You must do so, my child, because you know how very fond I am of you—I may say that, may I not, at sixty-five? I love you very much, Odile, and I have had so much to do with suffering in my time that I would like to flatten down under your feet every thorn of the wayside. But there are times when it seems to me—perhaps as a result of my anxious affection for you—there are times when I fancy that you are not always very reasonable."

"Reasonable!" Odile made an almost impatient movement. "But, Doctor, do you know what this 'very reasonable' life means that you are asking me to lead? A life to choke in, a life without the two essential things, air and liberty! If so many precautions are necessary to preserve life, then—so much the worse for life."

"Odile!" protested the old aunt, in grieved tones.

Then and there her niece, immediately repentant, went and kissed her with affectionate regret.

"You are right, Aunt; you have been a true mother to me since mamma's death, and I have done you injustice, because you are always kind and far-sighted. Still, if you only knew

how little I cling to life merely for my own sake! That's why, Doctor—though it isn't a very nice thing to say to you—but I wanted absolutely *not* to come and see you. I had a regular scene about it in the carriage with my aunt, for I wanted to skip Paris altogether. Never mind—what of that? Leaving the physician on one side, I love you, too, and with all my heart into the bargain!"

"Naughty girl!"

"There you are, Doctor," put in Aunt Bertha, "that is how she often makes me cry. If you knew how very bright and cheerful it really is at the Abbaye sometimes, just when Mademoiselle is 'mixing her black paints,' as you expressed it so well a moment since, and just when she is expounding to me her theories of life——"

"I guess them very well," replied the physician, playing with his eye-glass.

Odile, who had remained upon the sofa, nestling close beside her aunt, thereupon defended herself, in almost wheedling tones:

"Come, Aunt, be straightforward; I don't expound them so very often."

"I beg your pardon, pet—you are starting with the wrong notion that people talk with their mouths only; but, to people who love, everything has a voice; eyes that must have

been weeping in the night; a sad face; an attitude; a Schumann rêverie played over and over six times a day; glances through the window-pane at a dull gray sky; and your merest whims and fancies, even. For example, when you absolutely will go out on solitary rambles, and insist that you are fond of the autumn, and the wet woods, and the deserted fields, do you think I don't understand? It is so much more natural to love company and life, and the sunshine and the spring! And when you leave the plain high road on the right-hand side and go to La Ferlandière by way of the fish-ponds, do you fancy that all that kind of thing doesn't say to your old aunt, 'Odile is bored to death'? Just fancy, bored to death at twenty years of age, in the midst of nothing but sympathy and admiration, and without a single worry in the world! Mark my words, God will send you a real trial one of these days."

Upon this Odile stood up.

"Look here, Doctor," she said, "you have plenty of experience, and you won't treat me like a little girl. Answer me honestly: *Is* life so very good and happy and agreeable to live?"

"Yes—for certain persons in sound health."

"Wherefore," rejoined Odile, her lips showing an expression of mournful triumph, "some-

times sooner, and always later, we have to end up with *you*—with physicians of the body or physicians of the soul. There is always something to be repaired in our poor human machinery. The final note of life, then—its dominant—is the note of sadness. Press down any human key you like, and the sound will be a groan. I find myself asking, sometimes, with Victor Hugo:

"'Where can God find all the black for the pall
Of hearts at the breaking, and nights at the fall?'"

"That is not a Christian spirit, my child."

"Not a Christian spirit! But you are forgetting the name the Church gives our wretched world, 'a valley of tears.' Abbé Hans repeats it in the 'Hail, Holy Queen' every day after Mass."

"I assure you, Odile, that your reasoning is not Christian."

"Then—I no longer see——"

"I daresay not, but it is very simple for all that. The question is not one of finding out if life is happy and agreeable enough to be worth living for its own sake. You know very well, and the Abbé Hans—to whom, by-the-by, you mustn't forget to say a thousand nice things on my behalf—the Abbé will tell you much better than I can that we are in this world like travelers who have put

up for the night at a hotel. We don't understand much about the trials God makes us pass through. We are in His hands, as my patients are in mine. Very often, for their unquestionable good, I make them suffer, and suffer fearfully. They see no further than the sufferings of the moment, and they protest, but I keep on, because I am certain the future will justify me. Come, now, think it over, Odile; how do you expect that plans having to do with the future of every one of us—plans that have issued from the Divine Intelligence—can always and invariably be intelligible to us in this world? We must have trust in God, then. We shall not understand all the blind alleys and windings and other seeming incongruities of the way till we have reached the goal—the mountain-top—and then, looking back with the eye of faith, we shall take in at a glance the *whole* road. Again, suffering has another providential part to play. It is the powerful touch that thrills a soul right through, as the instrument is made to thrill by the pressure of the bow. You were quoting Victor Hugo just now. Let me answer you with a thought from poor Alfred de Musset, whom my father knew so well years ago. In one of his dark hours he wrote these beautiful lines, which are almost Christian in their spirit:

"'L'homme est un apprenti, la douleur est son maître;
Et nul ne se connaît tant qu'il n'a pas souffert!
C'est une dure loi, mais une loi suprême,
Vieille comme le monde et la fatalité,
Qu'il nous faut du malheur recevoir le baptême,
Et qu'à ce triste prix tout doit être acheté.
Les moissons, pour mûrir, ont besoin de rosée;
Pour vivre et pour sentir, l'homme a besoin de pleurs!.'"*

So believe me, Odile, it is wrong to have anything to do with pessimism at your age. Young and charming as you are, with a future, and better still, with love before you—why, Odile, you are tempting God!"

"I—tempting God?"

"Yes. He has drawn a veil over the future, and it was His will to draw it."

"Out of pity for us?"

"Possibly, but in any case He has drawn it so that you may enjoy the present. When His Apostles asked Him, 'Lord, how must we pray?' He replied to them, 'You shall say: Our Father, Who art in heaven . . . Give us *this day* our *daily* bread'—our material bread, that is, and the mystic bread of the heart as well. He, God Himself, repeated Himself, and made

*"Man is an apprentice; Sorrow is his master. No man knoweth himself save in so far as he hath suffered. It is a stern, but a supreme law, old as the world and fate, that we must be baptized by woe, and purchase our all at this grievous price. To ripen, the harvests have need of dew; to live, and to feel that he lives, man needeth tears!"

a seeming slip in the correct use of language intentionally, in order to force a truth home, deep down in our hearts and souls, and to rivet it there, so that all the despondencies of life should never have power to loosen it. In my career as a doctor I have lost count of all the people who could have been a hundred and a thousand times happier if they were Christians from this point of view. But no, in nearly all cases, the present hour counted for nothing in their impatience; they kept standing upon tiptoe, as it were, to pry anxiously into the future. And then what happened? They were tortured in the present by woes that the coming years hardly ever brought them. Now, now, Odile, you most earnestly desire to pass for a thoroughgoing Catholic everywhere, and yet you are *not* one in the most essential point, of confidence in God. Just step over to the window here. I was amusing myself just now when you came in with this little picture of country life below there, and I confess it interested me very much."

The doctor placed her close to the window, and then, pulling up the heavy blind, showed her, in the quadrangle beneath his balcony, a quite silent and lonely little stretch of lawn. One might think himself a hundred leagues from Paris to look at it, and yet the Place de la

Concorde was within two minutes' walk, close at hand.

In the stillness of the morning a tiny fountain in the court was spraying a whole bevy of birds, ringdoves from the Tuileries, starlings long since driven from the old Court of Accounts, and town-sparrows from anywhere, who had taken up their quarters in the safe harborage of a garden closed to the public. There they were, bathing and preening themselves, and singing away at the top of their throats, in the already paling sun of a September forenoon.

"You see, Odile?"

"Yes—you would almost fancy yourself at the Abbaye."

"Well, now, remember Our Lord's words: *'They gather not into barns.'* Every morning, when they wake up, they don't know where the day's food is to come from, or even whether they will live the day out. All the same, not one of them falls to the ground without God's permission. You are worth more than the birds of the fields. Have confidence, then!"

Odile rested her forehead against the chilly windowpane and gazed dreamily at the little bird-world below.

"You are right, Doctor," she said.

Just as she spoke the words a window oppo-

site was thrown outward, and the reflection settled full on the girl's fair hair and dappled her thoughtful brows with gold. The rekindling and idealizing beams made royally resplendent the too delicate radiance of her beauty.

"Bravo!" cried the aunt. "Look, Doctor, in one second you have converted her!"

"Provided the disease does not return!" rejoined Odile, not counting much upon herself.

"That depends on you," said the doctor.

"Really?" she asked, with a doubtful air.

"Be the strong woman of Holy Writ!"

"We'll try."

"That is not sufficient. You must say, 'I *will* become the strong woman.'"

"Very well, I *will*, Doctor! I will become one for the sake of all those whom I love."

With a kind, affectionate gesture, she put out her two gloved hands to the old physician.

"So, my poor Odile," he said, "we are going to become reasonable, then?"

"I promise you."

"Seriously?"

"Yes." She spoke the word with a determined, jerky little nod quite peculiar to herself.

The interview being closed, the doctor showed them out, but detained the aunt a moment in the corridor.

"Listen, Mademoiselle," he said. "I don't venture to say to you, 'Get Odile married off as soon as you possibly can,' but none the less, you never know, you never know. I have seen some extraordinary things that way, in my life as a medical man."

He then shook hands and went back to his room.

Aunt Bertha had not gone half-way down the staircase ere she overtook Odile, who was very quick of hearing.

"Well, Aunt?" she queried, buttoning up her jacket.

"Well, Odile?" echoed the aunt, affecting not to understand.

"Might I know, too?"

"Know what?"

"What this excellent medical man has just been confiding to you under his breath."

"He said to me—h'm—yes, he said to me: 'Above all—h'm—at the Abbaye, this winter, keep your heating apparatus well stoked.'"

Thereupon Odile, who was not thus easily to be taken in, kissed her aunt laughingly.

"And above all, *you*," she said, "don't forget next Saturday to accuse yourself to the Abbé Hans of a slight mental reservation. Who knows?" she added more seriously. "Perhaps it was a big one!"

CHAPTER VI

SING heigh! for the goodly three-fifty express at the Gare du Nord!

Odile, who had been first depressed by Jacques' telegram and by a longer stay in Paris than she had bargained for, and then cheered by the doctor and the prospect of immediate departure, was now pacing up and down, gaily and happily, exuberantly even, in front of the central compartment especially chosen for Aunt Bertha, who disliked a seat at the buffer-end, and always took careful precautions against the probabilities of a bump when the train was shunting or pulling up.

Being a notable little person for all her frail outward femininity, Odile had classified Aunt Bertha's luggage and her own on a clear and logical plan, in order that there might be no confusion of the Powers at the Vale of Api. First and foremost, there had been her famous brown leather traveling-bag, lined with green watered silk, a serious present from the serious Jacques, and one that had evoked, in Odile's home life, the most varied of pleasantries. The girl was always afraid of losing it or afraid that she had lost it, and could never face the notion of being deprived of its services for even the briefest trip anywhere. Consequently "Made-

moiselle's bag" was beginning to enjoy quite a small reputation, to which all in the home-circle contributed their quota. Even the servants smiled when a plan of travel was being sketched across the Abbaye dinner-table. Upon adjournment to the drawing-room, little Rosalie, who had a certain gift of sly humor, could seldom resist the pleasure of whispering to her young mistress:

"In that case, Mademoiselle, I shall have to bring it down."

"Bring what down?"

"Why, Mademoiselle, the little bag!"

After *the* bag, there had come under Odile's review its brothers and sisters, a beloved and numerous tribe, not one member of which must be forgotten on the station platform; the stereoscopic camera, the umbrellas and sun-shades, the rugs, the dust-cloak, and what not besides. Odile had most carefully inspected each one of these packages as her maid brought them up for review.

When everything had been properly stowed inside and her petty worries were over for the nonce, she gave herself up, with a sort of childish glee, to the sheer joy of departure.

First she went to the front of the train; then she went to the rear, and thence returned once more to the front. She simply pined to inter-

view the engine-driver or the fireman. Then, crossing the platform, she went and studied the freight cars in the siding beyond, inspecting their brakes and destination-labels precisely as though she drew eighteen hundred francs for the work, duly docketed at the company's pay-desks.

By instinct, she drew comparisons everywhere, to relish her own happiness the better. Over there were the porters, doomed to live always in feverish noise and an acrid, smoky, whirling atmosphere, amid the hubbub of all the platforms and the peril of all the converging lines. Yonder sat enthroned the female superintendent of the newspaper kiosque, a rugged, modern goddess, recalling from far indeed one of the old artistic Termini, the boundary deities of ancient Rome.

Whereas she, Odile—how she had been spoiled by God's Providence! How happy He had made her among all happy girls. In the doctor's phrase, how He had bent beneath her feet the thorns of the wayside!

In a very few minutes she would be leaving this maelstrom. And then, after passing through the manufacturing towns now spilled around Paris in an eddying overflow, she would be speeding homeward to the divine calm of nature and the friendly figures of Jacques and

"Odile stood up, quivering in every limb."—*Page* 77

his sister, whom she already saw in her mind's eye, a pair of impatient and well-nigh anxious portraits, as it were, framed beneath the arching station-roof.

Afterward, when they had passed through a few streets in the village, they would be out in the sunset, amid unending vistas of the beloved woods and the familiar fields. The land would have new aspects in the austere but kingly garb of autumn. The cornfields she had left ripe unto harvest, rolling like seas of tawny gold in every gust, would meet her eyes again to-night, despoiled and deserted, naked to the lowering sky. The Abbaye woods, erstwhile vocal with passionate and mysterious life, would be now telling the tale of death's omnipotence in each wilted leaf, wrestling and writhing at the bough-tips, loth to die.

Like the fond folk who turn a beloved letter over and over again between their fingers before opening it, Odile brooded pleasantly upon these anticipations till it was time to get in and take her seat.

Being kind-hearted, she gazed compassionately on the railway employees who had to stay behind on the uninviting platform. There they were, toilers all, infinitesimally small entities whose monotonous, impersonal labor was scaffolding up the fabric of other men's happiness,

in return for the slices of dry bread they found sweeter in a city than anywhere else.

"After all," thought Odile, "that is the way with life. You simply can't compel every one to be happy with the same prescription. If these men feel as happy on their asphalt pavement, among their piles of luggage, as our shepherd by the banks of the Jouine under his big poplars, it is their affair. God must have His reasons for allowing these different points of view."

The train started. Standing at the carriage window, Odile was not conscious of any particularly envious gazes resting on her. In her charitable little soul she was glad of this. Her happiness was complete, because none suffered by it.

"Well, Aunt, are you satisfied?" she said. Wont to commingle childish joys with spells of melancholy that Schopenhauer himself would not have disowned, she took her aunt's hand and kissed its owner twice. "Another journey well over, don't you think, Aunt?"

"The *last*."

"You always say that. Next year we'll go to Switzerland or to the North Cape. Tell me, will you?"

"The North Cape?" Excellent Aunt Bertha

raised her eyes to the roof in alarm. "Why not the North Pole?"

"Oh, Sweden or Italy, Aunt; you know there's not such a huge difference; it is going up instead of going down," replied Odile, imposing on the geographical mist in which Aunt Bertha had always dwelt. "And then," the girl went on, "how kind the doctor was to me! I am so glad now that I was obedient. You are a love of an aunt! I always keep hesitating at first, but when all has been said and done, you are always right in the end."

"I shall recollect that admission," said Aunt Bertha, carefully folding her lace mittens.

The train stopped at Creil to pick up the Amiens mail. Odile had no love for the prolonged periods of seclusion to which French railway companies condemn their passengers, and so got out on the platform at once and walked a few steps. Then she suddenly returned to call her aunt.

"Aunt, come here a minute," she said.

"Is it so very necessary?"

"Yes—quick!"

Aunt Bertha got out, and Odile took her by the arm immediately.

"Don't look to the right; it will be time presently—in half a second—when she comes back this way."

"Who is *she?*" gasped Aunt Bertha, who readily lost her bearings altogether whenever people tried to hasten her customary intellectual methods.

"Such a queer girl, who took three first-class tickets for the Vale just in front of me, at the Paris booking-office. There—she is passing on that side. Don't look yet."

"Wearing light gray?"

"Don't look too hard. Now you can look. That's the one."

There advanced as she spoke, between two stout gentlemen in black frock-coats, a tall, sturdy, and altogether bouncing girl, rather mannish in her strides, and wearing a tailor-made gown, and a hat tipped at the side with a single short quill.

She was talking loudly in a high key, like one accustomed to give orders without tolerating answers. Passing within a hair's breadth of Odile and her aunt, she looked at them carelessly, let her eyes rest a while on the younger of the two, whose air of distinction possibly impressed her, and then went on, indifferent and bored, between her two squires.

Aunt Bertha and Odile then leaned lightly against the iron barrier and looked on with growing interest. Nor, indeed, were they the only ones to do so. It was clear that the eyes

of all were focussed upon the loud-mouthed, almost exotic trio, the more so that one of the company's higher officials had just gone up to them, cap in hand.

"Gentlemen—Mademoiselle," he began, "we shall often have the pleasure of seeing you now. You would hardly believe how pleased I was when they telegraphed me about your success in the Vale of Api. I knew it ten minutes before the end of the meeting."

"You are very kind, sir."

Thereupon the four walked slowly up and down the platform together, chatting in animated tones, and laughing boisterously at times, paying no heed whatever to the attention they aroused, but indeed seeming happy in their position as people who owned things, and who felt themselves quite at home on a station platform open to all comers.

Without straining in the least, Odile could overhear much of the conversation. But she did not care for that kind of thing. And after all, thenceforward it must be expected that many new faces would be met with in the Vale of Api train. Further, since the telegram from Jacques, she had made up her mind to bother her head no more about the new state of things. The Abbaye was two full leagues away from the Vale railway station, and for a long while

yet to come that distance would suffice to protect the calm of her home-life. Afterward—well, afterward they would see. Sufficient for the day was the evil thereof. The doctor had said and repeated that ten times over to her only yesterday.

However, the general deportment and perpetual comings and goings of the three people under her eyes, their irritating scraps of talk flung temptingly into her scornfully reluctant ears, the strange girl's toilette also, quiet in its way and yet worn with much singularity—these things, and most especially the girl's haughty way of staring, decided Odile not to allow herself to be put out of countenance any longer.

"I say, Aunt," she suggested, "suppose we go to the refreshment-room."

"If you like, my dear girl!" very heartily responded Aunt Bertha, who had a considerable weakness for all minor creature comforts. "The suggestion is one I am very pleased with, on your account. You know, there is no question about it, the trip has done you good."

Then the worthy aunt, her eyes dimming a little with joy, proudly contemplated "her dear girl," there standing to await her decision, and looking supremely gracious and distinguished while she did so.

"You will come? Let us be quick, then," said Odile.

With a wary eye on her companion, that she might "mind" the steps and avoid the jolt of unforeseen descents, Odile crossed the line, found out the refreshment-room, and installed Aunt Bertha, with her back to the light, between three sandwiches and two cups of milk.

"Do you know those people?" queried Aunt Bertha absent-mindedly, in the course of a vigorous attack upon sandwich No. 1.

"I? No."

"What a tremendous hurry you were in to make me get out, then!"

"Oh, it was simply and solely because they had taken their tickets for the Vale—the dear old Vale. As you may guess, Aunt, it's not a bit of use my arming myself with the most philosophical resolutions. When it's a question of home, my heart jumps into my mouth."

"You a philosopher? What an extraordinary delusion," murmured Aunt Bertha, reaching out for sandwich No. 2. "Here, take this third sandwich; that will be better worth your while."

Odile sat down, put her veil up, and was proceeding to imitate, from afar, her aunt's gastronomic exploits. But it had been written that the bogies which had begun to haunt them

should pursue them still, even to the buffet-bar.

Had there been anything magnetic in Odile's proceedings, or were the three travelers simply obeying a spontaneous and simultaneous gastric appeal? Whatever the cause, they suddenly appeared—the gentlemen first and the girl afterward—in the refreshment-room doorway, and looked about them for a while. Then doubtless finding it a happy idea, they settled down at the next vacant table to where the two ladies were seated.

"Alberta, what will you have?" asked one of the two men in a squeaky little voice that shrilled through the room.

The girl gave a barely perceptible shrug, as who should say the choice was indifferent to her.

"The same as you, father," she replied.

"Well, waiter, a bottle of pale ale, and be sharp about it."

Conversation was then renewed between them.

This time Odile was pretty well obliged to hear what was said, because Aunt Bertha, now deep in her cup of milk, was growing more and more absorbed in epicurean delights.

They began by talking about building and other materials to be forwarded from Paris to

the Vale of Api—iron girders, turbines, building plans, hides, tin roofs, and driving-bands—the whole kitchen furniture of iron, wood, and raw material required for the starting of several leather works.

"You know, Victor," said the girl's father, "I have had the course of the Jouine sounded all along, from the Vale to the Neigerie, and even up to La Ferlandière. There's a famous river for you! We'll hardly want a single dam above the Vale, and there's a head of water to drive ten turbines."

"In that case," said Victor, a stout, red-faced man, as he uncorked the bottle of Bass, "you have definitely given up your idea of installing the branch cleansing-works at the Neigerie?"

"Oh, quite."

"And still it was such a practical scheme—the current there is stronger and has far steeper banks than at the Vale of Api. I don't know, for I haven't made the calculation, but you must be losing a whole lot of motive power there."

"What's the use of your telling me all that, since the thing can't be done?"

"Can't be done?" queried Victor skeptically. "It's only a matter of making a bid."

"I have made a bid—and doubled it, too."

"And then?" queried the other, lifting

two fat eyelids above two little blinking eyes.

"And then nothing could be done. Waiter! another bottle. Perhaps you would like to have a try yourself? You can go and interview a certain gentleman who lives down there in those parts, near the Neigerie——"

"But, after all, what is his motive exactly?" pursued Victor, the more desirous to be well informed in the facts that he was holding a half-share in the venture.

"Well, I'll tell you. I was very set upon having my boot and shoe works at the Neigerie four weeks ago. I told you so; but it wasn't, as you might think, simply and solely on account of the river. Without doubt the stream *is* tempting at La Ferlandière, and even at the Neigerie. Still, I had other reasons besides. I flatter myself I have a certain amount of factory experience. Now, I like to have the workshops well away from centers of population. It helps you to handle the men better; they are more under your thumb and have no chances of drawing comparisons and getting excited, as they do in towns. But, most of all, the hide business is awful in a town on account of the silly complaints it stirs up. Everything that stinks gets called leather. We take on our shoulders full responsibility for every stench in

the town—*that's* ruled flat, like a sheet of music-paper. Now, in settling down at the Neigerie, my only neighbors were two land holders I thought I could poison tranquilly and serenely."

"Well?"

"They stood out—or it would be more correct to say '*he* stood out,' because one of the two property-owners in question is an old maid, who has gone off to Italy for the present to thaw her rheumatics, along with her niece—a nice little girl, they tell me. The other party is a sort of sacristy-haunting country squire, who swears only by his potatoes. Soupot even calls him 'Patate.' Remember that big chap we ran against up beyond the Bois Roux the very evening of the vote? Do you call him to mind? A fair-complexioned fellow, with broad shoulders?"

"Ah," cried Victor, emptying his tumbler. "That Gaulish chieftain person—that Vercingetorix sort of individual?"

"The very man. He was gossiping with the postman."

"Quite so. I've got him."

"I asked the mayor to sound him—offered to cover him all over with gold. He didn't even reply. Now, the railway company can compel a forced sale, because it has Government be-

hind it, but I, being a private individual, and a Jew at that, haven't that power—as yet. What would you do in my place?"

"I—" began Victor, smiling thoughtfully, and putting his hand on his chin with the unmistakable air of one about to say something quite tremendous.

He paused, and there was silence for a second—just long enough to take a draught of bottled ale. Alberta was leaning back in her chair, rolling and unrolling her gloves, completely unconcerned. Odile, with flushed cheeks, kept her eyes on Victor, as though she would like to make him swallow the words he was about to utter.

"I," he resumed, "I would have had recourse to every stratagem sooner than let the four hundred country bumpkins in the Vale start howling like scalded cats, and draw up that pretty little petition of protest you were shown this morning at the Ministry."

"Did you remark, though? Soupot had scraped out the figure 0. The total stands at only forty now."

"I daresay, but there was a better way of arranging matters. You are a widower, aren't you? And what's more, though I don't say it to flatter you, I think you're not half bad looking in your little way. Very well, then, in-

stead of a frontal attack on Vercingetorix, I should have flirted a little with the old lady. That's right. These old women, you know—for my part, I have an appreciation of them words simply can't express!"

"The old lady at the Abbaye!"

"Why not? In due time you would take her as your second wife in just and lawful wedlock. A double event, my dear Nathan! You would become king of the district, and what is more——"

At this point Odile put down her cup on the marble table-top with such energy that it smashed to pieces, leaving the handle between her fingers.

"And what is more," pursued plump Victor, with a thick, beery laugh, "Alberta here could become the bride of the fierce Vercingetorix on the very same day! Don't you think it a jolly idea, my little double event? Say, Alberta, wouldn't you feel flattered to have a potato-sack on your coat-of-arms, and be called Madame de—by-the-by, what *is* your country squire's name, exactly?"

Nathan did not have time to make reply. Odile stood up, quivering in every limb.

"He is called Jacques de la Ferlandière, gentlemen," she said, "and he is my kinsman and our friend!"

The two men got up at once and spluttered out some apologies, which Odile heard not, for the porter's voice was now heard ringing through the refreshment-room: "Passengers by the express, take your seats, please."

There was much hubbub, and a headlong rush for the train, where Odile's maid, already uneasy about their long delay, was making signals from the window to show them their right compartment. The Jews took off their hats as they passed the two ladies. Alberta bowed stiffly, with a note of annoyance and a hard gaze fixed upon Odile, full of scornful and menacing interrogation. It seemed to say: "My small friend, you are a very pale-faced little person indeed to be the first to fire a shot. We shall meet again soon, perhaps!"

CHAPTER VII

THE express took a solid hour running from Creil to the Vale of Api. Sitting back in her corner, Odile kept asking herself all the time, without making up her mind one way or the other, this question: "When we get back, must I tell our friends at La Ferlandière about what happened in the Creil refreshment-room?"

Auntie, whose shapely nose had been still

deep in her cup during Odile's very rapid intervention, had noted nothing of significance in the attitude her niece had suddenly adopted.

"What is the matter?" she had asked, not knowing very well if there was anything that could matter at all.

"Nothing you need bother about," her niece had said.

"Still——"

"I assure you."

Thereupon auntie, in her favorite rôle as an over-indulgent mamma, had changed the subject with a captivating readiness that dispensed from all further explanations.

From this quarter, therefore, no cause of uneasiness would arise in case the girl decided to remain silent. With regard to her friends at La Ferlandière, the question was much more complicated. Doubtless Jacques would thank her for letting him know the real feelings of the newcomers toward him, but the revelation might cause him more annoyance than it was worth. Besides, there was nothing to hinder Odile from making it later on, amid a thousand different circumstances, if indeed the young man and his sister were not already far better informed on the facts of the case than she was herself.

Odile, in sooth, was willing enough to tell all

about the mere refreshment-room table-talk indulged in by Alberta's father and uncle. What she shrank from doing at any price was letting Jacques know about her own intervention.

Why was this? She herself would have been very puzzled to explain her reasons. They were all too vague and complicated to put into words, and yet quite simple and straightforward in the realms of thought.

With Odile's frank nature, however, it was quite impossible to tell any one thing without telling all about it. So she made up her mind then and there, and resolved to keep silence.

In order to drain the subject dry, and have no need of ever reverting to it afterward, she reflected yet once again, in the silence permitted her by circumstances, upon the oddity of this encounter. Well, well! So she had met the famous strangers without making the least effort; she had confronted the avowed opponents of Jacques; she had been the first to have a brush with the foe! She was almost proud of this. She now knew their feelings, and even some part of their plans. Each side had looked the other squarely in the eyes. Odile mentally recalled the two manufacturers' very ordinary-looking features. But she dwelt especially on Alberta's face.

With the mysterious intuition possessed by women, Odile had pretty well realized, while undergoing it, the meaning of the fixity of the girl's stare, and of her hard, malignant, set expression. And then the name *"Albertal"* Was it fancy or reality? She found something aggressive in the name—something evoking thoughts of battle—of warfare waged with herself, with Jacques, with his sister, with every one and everything she loved.

These reflections began to overshadow somewhat the happiness of her return, so Odile, by an abrupt exertion of will-power, ceased to advert to them, and turned to watch the familiar landscape fleeting past the carriage window, like the shadow of a dream. There was the Oise, at high water, its picturesque pinnace-like boats looking as though moored in the midst of green meadows. Yonder was Thourotte with its old church—and the Mennechet tower, silhouetting against the sky the wild fantasies of its carven lace-work. Next came Noyon, its houses clustered lovingly around the goodly cathedral. All the views after this were even more familiar and homelike. Dear memories seemed to arise on every hand in the light evening haze. In such a place she had ridden to hounds with Jacques. Over there was the convent of the Ladies

of the Cross, where she had spent a year. Yet further on lay estates belonging to family friends.

Daylight was near waning when they reached the Vale. Beyond the clear expanse of the open fields the chilly blue sky had little light to spare for the far skirts of the horizon. Jacques and his sister Jeanne stood awaiting them on the platform, in the front row of people standing under the station penthouse. Jacques looked almost stern in his dark cloak, while Jeanne was so snugly wrapped up in a plaid that Odile began laughing the moment she caught sight of them.

"Has it been freezing in this part of the world?" she asked.

"Yes, since you went away, fair Odile!" replied Jeanne.

"You are not ill, I hope?" pursued Odile.

"Ill!"

Indeed, the mere sight of brother and sister in the full flush of youth and vigor sufficed to dismiss the notion.

Big-hearted Jeanne impetuously hugged Odile without taking the slightest notice of the passengers and porters watching the little family scene with indulgent eyes. Then, between kisses, she stood back a moment to have a better look at her well-loved "chum."

"Why," she cried, "you are all sunbrowned —all sun-golden, rather!"

As for Jacques, he kissed Aunt Bertha with affectionate respect, and then took in his hand for some moments a little hand, which was not withdrawn.

"You are quite well, then?" he said.

While speaking the words, Jacques cast a kind, protecting gaze upon Odile, and, strive as he would to prevent it, his voice sounded as if it would fain say more, and took on the note of feeling which, ever and anon, rings out in the speech of all leal-hearted men and lends to their simplest utterance the tenderness of a caress.

"Quite well," replied Odile. "And you, Jacques?"

"Oh, I—" the young man said airily, with a wave of the hand that intimated how little he thought himself worth worrying about. He then insisted that they should not stay in the brisk draught, with all modern improvements, now playing through the station windows, the shattered panes of which had been left for ten days in a state of forbidding jaggedness.

"Whoever broke them?" asked Odile.

"Who? Everybody broke them," said Jacques. "There was a free fight here the day of the Council meeting. Besides, late and early

they are carting along iron girders, building stone, machinery, cement, and even—mind your dress!"

As a matter of fact the station platforms, heretofore so clean and restful, were now transmuted into one unspeakable higgledy-piggledy. The station-master's prim little garden, for instance, had become the site of a petrol-shed. Strange figures were to be seen on every hand, land-surveyors with chains and their colleagues with theodolites, contractors, navvies, and gangs of Belgian factory-hands, all idly swarming about, for the big clock in the freight depôt had just tolled six. Jacques was in a hurry to be off, for the girls were now being openly stared at, with a boldness the place had hitherto never known.

"Yes, let us go," conceded Odile.

"Firmin!" cried Jacques, looking around.

The valet, who had been getting the trunks together, came up to his master.

"I shall leave you at this," said Jacques. "See to everything. Here's the luggage-check; there are six items registered in all. You will take everything up to the Abbaye on the waggonette."

"The ladies can make their minds easy, sir," replied the man. "There won't be anything missing."

Thereupon they left the station building. The family coach from La Ferlandière was waiting outside, surrounded by a regiment of small boys.

"Oh, Jacques," said Odile, somewhat disappointed, "you have brought the big closed carriage, and I was hoping you might have sent the open victoria."

"That's just it," said Jacques sagely, putting his passengers inside and giving a final look to the traces, to make assurance doubly sure. "That's just it—you would have liked the victoria, so as to lose the whole benefit of the trip the moment you got back. It will be blowing very fresh presently, out in the country, once we are past Brésolettes. You are no longer in Italy, you know. In fact, the very reason why I'm driving you myself to-night is because the coachman caught a chill yesterday evening. We must be prudent, you see, my wise friend."

By this time they were being hemmed in closer and closer by the ring of unknown urchins, whose peaked faces told other tales than the chubby cheeks of country-bred children. Behind them were a number of casual laborers, stonemasons, and mixed applicants for work, craning their necks and staring with no end of cheap scorn, and a general air of not

knowing what on earth to do with themselves.

"Are we off now?" asked Odile, grown impatient of the rude glances directed at her, and of certain innuendoes which she could very well divine.

Jacques took the reins, and while he was driving on at a slow pace, on account of the children in the way, and highly unwilling to get out of it, an extremely smart victoria passed them at top speed, bearing aboard the principals of the limited liability venture, Messrs. Harmmster, Harmmster & Co. Jacques glanced at the occupants of the carriage, and caught sight of the top of a lady's hat. He at once turned sideways on the box-seat to speak a word through the lowered front window behind him.

"Look at them," he said laughingly. "The future owners of La Ferlandière!"

Odile half stood up, and turned suddenly red as she recognized the trio.

"Already!" she murmured beneath her breath. Her happiness had made her forget everything about them. But Jeanne rubbed in her brother's comment.

"Odile!" she said. "Make a courtesy! Queen Cordwainery is passing by! One thousand pairs of shoes a day to begin with! People

will no longer be able to say that we are barefoot beggar-maids all in these parts!"

"They have a pretty carriage, and two horses that seem splendid," remarked Odile.

"Is that right?" Jeanne asked her brother. "Are they really fine horses?"

"Splendid horses?" echoed Jacques, getting the reins together with a mock-piteous gesture. "Poor Odile! I don't know but what the buyers may be smarter men in other respects. Still, I must say, in all my farming life I've seldom known two worthy gentlemen to be more picturesquely swindled in a horse-deal! However, you will see for yourselves."

From the Vale of Api to the hamlet called Blanc Buisson two roads run almost parallel, one of them more recently constructed than the other. Naturally, most people select the newer road, but at the period of the events described the old highway had once again become preferable, on account of the strings of drays and trucks transporting building materials for the factories, which encumbered its rival. The old way is a trifle longer and less level than the other, which it eventually rejoins near the first gables of Blanc Buisson, after winding through the Frilleux fields and skirting Brésolettes.

Jacques took the old road, and ten minutes

later sighted the victoria when nearing Frilleux. The showy carriage-pair were solemnly enacting a preposterously high-stepping trot, evoking far-away memories of the circus-ring.

For a few minutes the hoofs of Jacques' two horses, Spark and Rogue, thudded steadily and sturdily on the hard gravel main street of Frilleux, and then emerged once more between the fenced fields. The moment they left the village, however—in fact, as soon as the houses began to space out, Jacques looked behind for the whereabouts of the victoria. These were none too easy to ascertain, for the horizon lay blurred in the gloaming. At length, however, the Squire made out a blackish dot moving dimly along the new road.

"Do you see them, down beyond?" he said. "They have lost nearly three-quarters of a mile. Think of it," he added with a smile; "they have only just paid ten thousand francs for that pair!"

"Are they their *own* horses, then?" asked Odile, in surprise.

"Their very own."

"They have started housekeeping as quick as lightning, then."

"Absolutely. Poor Odile, we are all a family of extremely worthy folk here, but oh, so simple! With the result that I only learned

through Etienne the day after the famous meeting that two-thirds of the Town Councillors had been bought over by the other side, either simply and solely with five-franc pieces, like Soupot, or more ethereally, with assured promises of land purchase, or of running a new street near their premises, and so forth. When that was the case, the taking of the vote became a mere nasty practical joke. All the while we were arguing at the Council meetings down there those two apostles, prancing along behind us, were hurrying up to forward their household furniture to the Vale station against the winter, and to get a year's lease of the old mansion at Frilleux, where, by-the-by, they are going to sleep to-night."

"But we have already got beyond Frilleux," observed Odile.

"Quite so, but these gentlemen are very particular people. In view of the fact that the aroma of raw hides would annoy them, they are putting up their nastiest factory half way to Brésolettes, so as to make sure of embalming the Vale from three different points of the compass all at once. They are going off now to show the girl this factory."

"I don't suppose she will take much interest in the thing."

"No, and besides, they won't be able to give

her more than a mere glimpse, for it will be dark presently," returned Jacques.

Odile laughed as she met his gaze. "One would think you were a cousin of theirs," she said. "You know all about them!"

"Certainly I do. I no longer let them out of my sight. The first battle was unlucky for me, but I have quite made up my mind to win the second. What is more, our male foes are *seemingly* very good fellows. They are even anxious to scrape acquaintance. My man Firmin has already had to decline a box of good Havanas from their coachman, and into the bargain they have sounded me, through him, about the purchase of twelve pairs of oxen from La Ferlandière."

"Would you sell them?"

"I don't know. I shall see. Probably I shall. Why not?"

"It seems like giving arms to the enemy," said Odile.

"At first sight it does, but not when you think it over. Besides, they will have to pay a stiff price for respectable oxen from La Ferlandière, if they insist upon taking a fancy to them."

There was silence in the little party for some minutes, which were devoted to pleasant thoughts of the home-coming. Nothing now

broke in upon the calm of the open country, save once in a while the jolting of a wheel in a rut or the barking of some house-dog running out to the garden railing as the carriage passed by. It had been daylight when they left the Vale, but the lamps would certainly have to be lit before they drove through the Bois Roux.

Odile had held her peace this little while, but now she took Jeanne's hand in hers.

"How kind you are, both of you," she said, "to come and meet us at the station like this."

Jacques turned as she spoke and peered at the girls behind him, seated in the dusk within.

"I say, Jeanne," he said, "can you fancy Aunt Bertha and Odile turning up unaccompanied at the Vale at six o'clock in the evening, with all the factories turning out, and the station platforms in a hubbub? Can you imagine them with no friendlier figure than old Baptiste, their coachman, to enliven the situation for them?"

"That is true," said Odile simply. "All the same, when one comes home to find things no longer one's own, but different, or done away with altogether, it is so good to find at any rate one friendship that hasn't changed."

"And that never will!" replied Jacques.

"Unless," he added musingly, "to become still better."

"Why, these factory people must be working night and day," resumed Odile.

Jacques made no reply for the moment. They were now getting nearer to the Abbaye, and the road at first ran abruptly downhill. But when he was free to keep a lighter rein he gave explanations.

"They have taken on double gangs of men to put up each factory, a day gang and a night gang apiece, and the whole crowd is working away like the deuce! The very day after the vote, before anything had been formally ratified in Paris, their pickaxes were at work in the Frilleux meadows, and the first of the iron girders was reaching the station, coming along from the foundries at Montataire. Anyway, you'll see for yourself to-morrow. I'll look you up with the victoria, if it is a fine day, and show you the doings of Soupot's band."

"It has come to that at last," sighed Odile. "Poor Vale!" And then she added, as though doubting or distrusting her own opinions and feelings: "Jacques, do you think my way of looking at things sentimental at all, something like the mere personal feelings of a painter fond of his picture and unwilling to see it spoiled—do you think I am making too much of my

impressions? Does the establishment of all these factories really and truly mean misfortune to the district?"

"There is not the least doubt of it," the young man replied. "A great misfortune, not so much on account of the factories in themselves, as such, because they are sometimes the necessary outgrowth of particular localities, but in view of the very significant circumstances attending their establishment here."

Jacques then told them, during their leisurely ascent of the rising ground approaching the Abbaye, about the scenes at the meeting, about Soupot's arrogant retorts, and the rivalries and feuds already set on foot in every family in the neighborhood by the mere prospect of the new works. He pointed out that heretofore every one had known every one else in the neighborhood, so that whenever a laboring man was in distress and needed a helping hand —a rather rare occurrence—he could always count on getting it. Whereas now and henceforth, from the Vale of Api up to Blanc Buisson, there were only strange faces to be seen. The luckless Etienne, in his capacity as mayor, had already been forced to take police precautions in the matter of vagrants, and also to get a sum of two thousand francs voted by the Council for the erection of a night-shelter

at the further end of Frilleux. This structure afforded the farmers a convenient pretext for refusing the use of their barns to free-and-easy and sometimes bullying requests from wandering tramps seeking a night's shelter.

Night had now fallen, an all-embracing pall of darkness, solemn and serene, with just a sprinkling of stars here and there overhead, in the silence of infinite space. There was the great calm of eventide—scarce did the leaves rustle on the topmost branches of the gently swaying poplars. The carriage made but little sound as it rolled quietly along on the firm, level road. The hedges stood out in the gloom like living things, and when the lamps threw their vivid rays upon them, and upon the roadside bushes, strange beings seemed to appear and disappear, haunting the carriage on either side with a sense of stealthiness and mystery.

"The way things are now," said Odile, almost under her breath, "I should be terrified to come home by myself, with all this talk of tramps about."

"You needn't be afraid, then," said Jacques. "Factory influences won't make themselves felt further out than Blanc Buisson. I feel quite sure of that. Besides, I intend to play up for our side. I have already taken a lease of the sporting and forest rights of the Bois Roux,

and if a chance offers of buying it outright one of these days I'll do so. I want all three of you to be as happy and undisturbed as you have ever been. Between you and the factory folk there will always be—myself."

He said this quite simply and unaffectedly, after the manner of strong men.

"Where are we now?" Jeanne queried. "I can't see a bit."

"We are coming into the Bois Roux."

"Can you see?"

"Not too well."

Jacques, in fact, had slackened his horses' speed, because the road, now passing between stretches of copse-wood marked for felling, was narrowed by the rows of polled tree-trunks lined up along the ditches ready for removal.

"I am sure everything is quite ready at the Abbaye," put in Aunt Bertha.

"The bedrooms are," said Jeanne.

"What makes you say that?"

"Because you are going to dine at La Ferlandière."

"Surely not! I sent Constance full directions for the dinner in a letter from Paris."

"You will find them carried out in to-night's menu at La Ferlandière," said Jeanne triumphantly.

After a brief rebellion, Aunt Bertha found

the solution a very satisfactory one. It would certainly have been dreary to be left all alone to themselves in the big house, amongst unpacked trunks, the first night of their return from a long and diversified foreign trip. Still, Aunt Bertha was anxious to stop just a few minutes to greet the old house, where the brief married life of Odile's parents had run its course like a happy dream.

"We must look sharp about it, then," said Jacques. "It is getting late."

Emerging from the road through the thickets, the horses were given their heads and went at speed. It is a fine stretch of road from the Bois Roux to the Abbaye, rising gently from the level between two rows of tall poplars. These giants are a landmark to the whole country-side. Being well spaced out, they allow from the road—in daylight, of course—an unimpeded view of the Abbaye and the Fumeçon hamlets to the right, and, on the near side, of the Neigerie gables, the calm course of the Jouine (at this moment reflecting a myriad stars), and, finally, of La Ferlandière itself.

Aunt Bertha put her face to the glass of the carriage window and seemed anxious to peer through the darkness.

"All the same," she suggested to Jacques for

"Jacques had put him on his own horse and ridden back with him to the Abbaye."—*Page* 101

the second time, "I suppose we can stop a little while at the Abbaye?"

"It must be only a little while, then," he replied. "If you stay too long you will be exposing us to avenging thunderbolts from the kitchen authorities at home."

"We have got to the level at the top of the rise now," said Aunt Bertha. "Look! there is the turret!"

The Abbaye, indeed, was confronting them at near distance, its gray bulk dimly outlined against the dark background of the woods. Although retaining no more of the original monastic fabric than some portions of the venerable, ivy-clad walls, the comparatively modern Abbaye looked indeed impressive, thus seen by night, in a wan glory of unwavering, ghostly moonlight.

Absence, as we know, makes the heart grow fonder. Moreover, many strange things had befallen since Odile went away, so that she now rose from her seat and gazed at her home with much emotion.

"Don't you think the Abbaye looks something like a fortress to-night, Jacques?" she whispered.

"Yes, it does," he replied. "Why not? It is becoming one, like the other fortification down yonder." He pointed as he spoke to

lights twinkling amid the fields at the far end of the road. They gleamed from the distant windows of La Ferlandière.

"I even think we are being expected there," he added with light irony. "We must be quick, Aunt, we must be quick."

The reminder was needed. Aunt Bertha had so far renewed her youth as to jump down from the carriage and begin lavishing greetings and advice upon all and sundry of the Abbaye servants, who had run out to the gate when they heard the sound of familiar wheels on the lonesome road. There was much kissing and hand-shaking in the dark, with questions and answers and exclamations and all the thousand and one little nothings that make home-comings so delightful.

"It all went off all right, then?"

"Yes."

"No accidents?"

"No."

"No seasickness or sunstrokes?"

"No. You'll hear all about it to-morrow. Baptiste, come for us at La Ferlandière about ten o'clock."

It was then for Jacques to intervene. No, he said, Jeanne and he would themselves bring the travelers home again that night, up to the Abbaye door, and—no, there was no need to

worry about the horses, thanks, there were plenty of others in the La Ferlandière pastures. However, poor Baptiste, coachman at the Abbaye for upward of twenty years, who had driven Odile to be christened at the little parish church of Fumeçon, now gazed upon his young mistress with such real distress in his eyes that Jacques surrendered at once.

"Very well, Baptiste," he said, "don't look so broken-hearted about it. You can come and call for your ladies at La Ferlandière to-night."

"Thank you, Monsieur Jacques. It's such a long time that we've been starving for a sight of Mademoiselle!"

"Quite so. Very well, that's settled; only you must be careful to bring the coupé. There will be a sharp wind to-night."

"Certainly, Monsieur Jacques," said the old retainer.

Jacques rounded the Abbaye very slowly, as though to prolong a feast of the eyes for the returned wanderers. Then he started the horses at a rattling pace along the road going down to La Ferlandière. It was the road home to the stables, and the beasts needed no urging. Acquaintances of theirs out at grass to either side of the road, mares with their foals and cows with their pedigree calves, got up and

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gravely took stock of them over the meadow fences as the carriage rolled along.

It was all most friendly and homelike. Ever and anon they overtook or met belated farm-hands from the Abbaye or La Ferlandière getting back to Fumeçon or the Neigerie; cowmen and shepherds with their staves and rough tillers of the soil emerging from the green field-paths onto the highway. All these members of their big family touched their caps as Jacques drove by, in a manner bespeaking much quiet pleasure at their safe return.

These lowly friends of theirs, all of whom they knew by name and respected, were paying a token of respect to them as God's treasurers, entrusted with stewardship of the land. As for Jacques himself, though quite a young man to be paterfamilias, he was being greeted as such by his grown-up gray-haired children. He was the son of his father and the scion of an ancient house, whom they and theirs had loved and served. So the words, "Good-night, Monsieur Jacques," heard constantly all along the road, gave out chords of friendliness and homely freedom that placed the district of La Ferlandière whole worlds asunder from the new-fangled Vale of Api.

Sitting back in her corner, Odile studied Jacques, perched upon the box-seat before her,

He was a splendid figure of a man and seemed somehow to domineer the great grassy landscape slumbering in the moonbeams, while he kept giving the same gravely courteous greeting, "Good-night, my friend," to all who saluted him, from the most responsible of foremen to the smallest of shepherd boys. To her mind he was a king, after the manner of kings in patriarchal days. And presently, under the composing influences of the evening and the peaceful sense of a journey well accomplished, the girl's remembrances of him began to pass through her mind in orderly array, like the beads of a rosary circling through a worshiper's fingers, each one automatically replacing the other.

Her mind went back four years. She recollected how, an orphaned girl of sixteen, who had lost her mother at her birth, she had then lost her father also. He had been stricken down by the sun as he stood in the blazing harvest-field amid his reapers, and it was Jacques who had picked him up in his arms and put him on his own horse and ridden back with him to the Abbaye. She remembered the death-chamber, flooded with light through the wide-open windows, as though the July sun were watching and waiting its martyr, who lay

dying on the undisturbed coverlet of his newly made bed, booted and gaitered as he had fallen in the field. "What is the use of undressing?" he had said. "My time has come. Unlace my boots, though, for the holy oils." When the Abbé Hans had administered the last rites, her father had summoned Jacques from the far corner of the room, where he had been silently looking on, with unspeakable sadness in his eyes. "Jacques," her father had said, "come here!" The dying man then placed his already chill hand upon Odile's head as she sobbed beside him, and pointed to the great expanse of country without, all glowing and quivering in the blazing sunlight. There lay the Abbaye estates. They could be seen through the uncurtained windows in all their calm, far-reaching outlines, and in the busy intensity, too, of their life at murmurous noontide. "Jacques," said her father, "my daughter—my land! I confide them both to your honor and your friendship."

The young man had fallen on his knees beside Odile, and the two had bowed their heads beneath the tremulous hand still extended as in benediction. It was then, while they thus knelt, that Death had come, and gently lowered her father's outstretched palm till it rested upon their brows, bent together in commingled grief and resignation, sealing and signing

them, as it were, with a hallowed token from the life beyond.

Ever since, Jacques had been a wise, reverential and very strong protector. His tutelary presence made itself everywhere felt. He was a knight-champion upon whose aid she could rely securely in all troublous hours, and never more so than now, when, perhaps, there would be sorest need of it. He was her living embodiment of the sweetest, the gravest, the grandest word on earth: he was her friend.

* * * * *

At length these recollections of both joyful and sorrowing days were lulled by the smooth rolling of the carriage, and finally lost altogether in a mind fatigued by the rapid succession and depth of its own perceptions. Odile just sat still, quiet as a mouse, with a smile hovering round the corners of her lips, like a happy child dreaming a lovely dream.

"How good God is!" she murmured. It was a phrase which often rose to her lips when she thought of the watchful affection that guarded her path in life and constantly interposed between her girlish weakness and the wickedness of the world. "Yes, how good God is!" she repeated.

As she did so, the carriage stopped and Jacques stepped down to open the door. Odile

remained nestled where she was for a moment, and thus had a clear view of his face and of all the old La Ferlandière servants behind him, smiling through the shadows upon the young life so safely brought back to their midst. Stepping down among all these friendly faces and gladly outstretched hands, she could speak no word of reply. She was confronted by one of those gentle, loving welcomes which somehow bring to the eyes unbidden, silent tears. It was with a tremulous hand that she returned each cordial clasp. The deepest joys, like the most unfathomable sorrows, are mute.

CHAPTER VIII

NEXT morning Jacques arose at his usual early hour and flung his window wide open to the keen morning air. It promised to be a very fine day, with the peculiar charm of early autumn, cool, mild, and, so to say, friendlier than flaming June. A light morning mist rose up from the pastures and enveloped everything in wistful grays—blue-gray, buff-gray, in sky and fields; drab-gray in the stubble; silver-gray amid the fish-ponds and the birch-trees. The Bois Roux alone stood out from this haze higher up, a black clump of dripping

woodlands, looking for all the world like a giant bunch of dusky flowers, ribboned about the stems by the Jouine, whose winding waters girdled the outlying copses with a shimmering baldric.

Needing a horse, Jacques went in quest of one down the long walk in the home-park, where the sun was playing hide-and-seek through the tall hedgerows. Thence he made his way to the farmstead. All hands were already afield, and the young man was proceeding toward the kitchen-garden when he caught sight of Sylvain, the postman, with a bundle of letters and newspapers in his hand.

"Hallo!" cried Jacques. "You *are* coming down to La Ferlandière to-day, then, after all?"

"Got to now," muttered the postman. "Down at the Vale there they won't let me hand my letters over any more."

"Perhaps it is just as well, with all these new faces about everywhere. Still, you know, with my old hands at La Ferlandière I am not so particular. If you run against Jean Louis, or Foratier, for instance, you have my full authority to hand the mail to them."

"The old hands change, too," growled Sylvain, shaking his head.

"Do you think so?"

"I don't think so, I am sure of it. Look at Pourlier-Cardot, the farmer up at Brésolettes. He is hard put to it this week to find men to pull his beetroots. All his carters are leaving him to go to work for the factories."

"They are paid better wages there, I suppose?"

"I should just about think so! They get a full third more than their present pay, and you can imagine, Monsieur Jacques, if that isn't a great temptation. It would be nothing for you, of course, but what must it be to a laboring man with a family? Think of it! Thirty francs a month extra in the family money-box. It won't be long before no one will be able to stand out against it. The movement that way is only just beginning. When all the buildings are finished, and the three factories are in full blast, you'll see then! There will be a wilderness all around you, and you'll have to send for Belgian hands if you want to go on and keep tilling your ground."

"I shall always till my ground."

"Who is going to work for you?" asked Sylvain, skeptically.

"Our own people, from the Neigerie and Fumeçon."

"Will you pay them as much as the factory? There's the whole case in a nutshell."

"In the first place, the whole case is not there in a nutshell. In the second, I shall pay them as much as the factory, if I can."

"All right. Even so, they won't stop with you. I'm absolutely certain of it. You have no idea of the way they are talking down in the Vale about the tremendous drudgery of having to live by the land, and more especially what chance-work it is, too. If you only knew how the Frilleux peasantry held in with arguments against the land at a public meeting the other day, and chuckled over the fun poked at it, you'd be a bit scared yourself. To hear them talk, tilling the land has become suitable work only for fools who absolutely can't do anything else. After taking any amount of trouble with the ground, they say, the ungrateful thing will do no more than give you, at the end of the day's work, the *hope* of a harvest that perhaps will never materialize. You take every precaution, you provide yourself with all sorts of guarantees, and you choose your seed well, but who can assure you that you are not going to be frozen out, hailed out, scorched out, swamped out? Now, the factory-hand hasn't any of these worries. It doesn't matter to him what weather it is. Every night of his life the white pieces are clinking in his hand, full weight, three francs, four francs, five francs, as the

case may be, and sometimes up to six francs and more. You'll see in a few months' time if there won't be any amount of comparisons at work that will put ideas into people's heads, and end by making up their minds for them."

"I hope not," replied Jacques.

"For my part, I'm sure that you are wrong, and that I'm right in what I say, because I hear people talking everywhere, and I'm perfectly convinced that Soupot's work is only just beginning. Building the factories, that was the first result he aimed at, and now he is anxious to find men for those factories. Paris workmen won't come out here, and so he'll have to pick up gangs in the district."

"And take them away from the land," murmured Jacques.

"Of course!" said the postman. "Why, the café-keeper's touts and potmen are scouring the villages, hunting up the working man at home, and even canvassing him out in the farmers' fields! So I give you the straight, neighborly tip, Monsieur Jacques—look out. You've got to deal with some rough customers on the other side. They will stick at nothing in the time to come, no more than they did in the past."

Jacques made reply in tones showing that he

only spoke aloud what had long been matter of fixed resolve in his mind.

"I shall do what you call the impossible," he said. "I shall keep my men from getting caught in Soupot's traps. I shall defend them against themselves and against him. But even if I were to fail so far as they are concerned, I can answer and give surety for myself that I shall continue to be what I am, a challenge-holder for the land, ready to fight for it against all comers. I am telling you this, Sylvain, so that you may repeat it everywhere, as often as ever you like, along every road, and to the four winds of heaven."

"What's the use? From this out you won't find any one to cultivate the ground for you."

"I shall have it all planted with trees, then, or else turned into grazing land. Surely I shall find ten men, or ten women, to milk my cows for me?"

"I don't know—I don't know," replied the postman, shaking his head. "They are going to take on women to work at the factories."

"Of course they are. The men will work all night, and the women all day. What will the fathers and mothers do with their children?"

"No mortal man can attend to everything, can he?" protested Sylvain. "The children of Monsieur Nathan's factory-hands? You can

imagine what tremendous worry they cause Monsieur Nathan!"

So saying the postman took out his watch and observed that time was getting on.

"Good-by, Monsieur Jacques," he said. "I am late as it is. The good times are gone forever. I have barely three minutes left to take my glass in the kitchen. That is, if you are still agreeable."

"Take two glasses, if you like—but don't take more!"

"Ha!" exclaimed Quattepanche, straightening himself with much complacency. "You know my name. It means—in the patois—Four-Paunch!"

Jacques returned to the house and glanced through his letters and papers over a quick breakfast. The local journal, the *Courier du Val,* gave pride of place to an article announcing the Prefect's forthcoming visit for the ceremonious opening of the new factories. This function was to be accompanied by a grand open-air fête in the Town-hall square, gratuitous steam merry-go-rounds, a balloon ascension (gas provided by the company), and to conclude, of course, with a "Grand Evening Ball" at Soupot's.

Jacques was more than a little sick. "Al-

ready!" he said to himself. Odile's phrase, too, kept recurring to his mind—the dubious, hesitant query of a girl afraid to judge things out and out from too personal and sensitive a standpoint. "Do you think the factories are really and truly a misfortune for the district, Jacques?" Poor girl!

To cut these reflections short, he sent Firmin to get a horse saddled, and was soon riding afield to see his men at work.

He felt braced in the free morning air. The sun was now gently mounting clear of the haze, and seemed to be drinking in the scents of all nature, as though inebriated with their fragrance, like a lover with his lady's bouquet. The country gave forth the sweet smell of the morning, so well relished by all familiar with life and work afield. No dust flew, for the road was yet damp with the mist. The distinctive aroma of clean wood-smoke saluted the nostrils from every cottage. The last winged insects of the bygone summer disported themselves in the sunbeams playing on thatch, on threshold, and through open doorways, whither old grandams were creeping slowly from within, to see the fine gentleman go by on horseback.

Jacques drew rein when nearing the Abbaye, where the windows as yet remained unopened.

The travelers were manifestly still resting from their long journey, so Jacques turned to the right and rode away across the fields to the Neigerie, where his men were at work taking up the beetroot crop.

Soupot's agents had certainly not yet been that way, for hats and caps were doffed on every hand in unmistakably friendly fashion when the Squire came on the scene. As luck would have it, it was fearfully tough work that day; perhaps the hardest task of all the year. Each and every beetroot had to be groped after deep in the earth, and drawn without cracking the end, which contains the greatest quantity of sugar. Then the roots had to be stacked up in enormous wagons, drawn by twelve oxen apiece, and carted away across the heavy, rich flat lands by the Jouine. Thence they had to be drawn from the flat lands up and along the steep farm-road leading to La Ferlandière.

The splendid, powerful beasts, all bred on the farm, had to strain at the yoke and pull hard on the uphill journey. On the down grade their work became really more than difficult, for it was not without its spice of danger. In spite of the relief afforded by braking the wheels, the oxen had sometimes to prop themselves steady, and even thrust their shanks all

but knee deep into the soil, to keep from being swept away downhill.

It was a scene of wondrous patriarchal grandeur and simplicity in its autumnal setting; the steaming beasts, moving to and fro, whichever way they were bidden, and all making the one same effort in response to the teamsters' shouts; the great wooden wagons creaking aloud beneath their monstrous burdens; the young master in the saddle, guiding the course of the work and allotting each man his exact day's task, and then withdrawing to the woodlands, gladdened at heart, because he could still feel sure of his men and their loyalty.

Leaving the Neigerie, the Squire went on at a footpace to the Bois Roux, where his woodcutters were at work. He met the manager on the way, and begged him to have formal notice of permission announced by the town crier, as far out as Brésolettes, for all poor persons to come and pick up dead boughs and branches during the week. Returning by way of Fumeçon, he sighted midway the now opened Abbaye windows, and discerned Aunt Bertha in the distance watering her flowers on the terrace. He even waited a while to see if Odile might put in an appearance, but he was woefully late for luncheon, and so, turning the

horse's head homeward, he galloped back by the high road.

Reaching La Ferlandière, he found his sister standing at the park palings, apparently engaged in keeping a lookout along the road.

"I hope," he said, with a brotherly kiss, "that you are well forward this morning?"

"This morning?" queried Jeanne archly. "You must say 'this afternoon,' my boy."

Quizzically, she then informed him that it was a quarter-past twelve; that whatever might have been ready for lunch was assuredly now overdone; that when he went afield he forgot everything else, especially the time of day, his lonesome little sister moping at home, and their poor friends down at the Abbaye. It was the land first and the rest nowhere.

"The land," echoed Jacques. "It looked lovely this morning, Jeanne. I feel as if I were discovering it afresh every day of my life. It has a way of being beautiful always without ever repeating itself. You ought to have seen all those oxen tugging away. It was a true, living Rosa Bonheur picture in the life. It was wonderful."

"Oh, I know all about it," said Jeanne airily. "I shall end up by feeling jealous of your oxen! Come, be quick and have lunch the moment you are prepared. Cook is on the warpath

already. I can tell it by the set of her cap at the true battle-bonnet angle!"

Jacques did not wait to be asked twice. A young man cannot gallop at large through fields and woods for four hours steadily without experiencing certain agreeable sensations at the prospect of a good meal. Besides, Jeanne certainly spoiled him. Although he protested loudly his love of archaic cookery, his sister had a way with her of contriving a bill of fare which was simple and at the same time delicious, so that the Château good cheer was famous for many a mile around.

They spent little time over luncheon, for the victoria awaited them at the hall door and the autumn days were now drawing in. The meal ended, they drove at a gallop to the Abbaye, where they were met at the gate by Odile, who showed no traces of fatigue. On the contrary, the long journey had made a complete change in her for the better. Always affectionately solicitous on her behalf, Jacques sought in vain for the indefinable expression that had been habitual to her before she went abroad, as though she were always musing upon an inner world known only to herself, from which her thoughts were never entirely detached.

To-day, however, as she came forward along garden-walks made musical with fallen leaves,

her face all bathed in bright sunlight, like a living flower amid flowers, Odile's past cares seemed soothed away by the great murmurous lullaby of the afternoon fields. She was a delight to the eyes when she came to her guests with happy brows and outstretched hands. There was that in her which very few women possess—an irresistible grace, a mysterious power of charm, which is the exclusive gift of those who know not that they have it and who never go in quest of it.

"Good afternoon, my friends!"

"Good afternoon, Odile."

Jacques took the little hand placed frankly in his, while Jeanne kissed its owner.

"Have you unpacked all your albums?" she whispered.

"Not yet," said Odile, "but I can easily do so. Do you want to see them? They are upstairs."

"My dear, I am dying to see them," said the impetuous Jeanne.

"But they will bore poor Jacques here to death," exclaimed Odile with a quizzical air.

Jacques made his disclaimer firmly. He was wholly at the girls' disposal, he said. Certainly the light would soon be fading, and a drive in an open carriage, especially under such a sun as now shone, would assuredly meet with the

doctor's approval. On the other hand, the drive need not be lost altogether, but be put off for another day, and the factories were not so very prepossessing that they could compete with Italian scenery.

"Very well, then," said Odile, "I'll go and get my masterpieces."

Hastening to her room, she soon returned, and the three decided to look over the drawings out of doors, as the weather was so mild.

A kind of old-world cloister winds round the inner courtyard of the Abbaye. Its stonework is moss-grown, its pillars time-worn, and the pointed old arches are stoutly selvaged with wistaria, the creeping stems of which show clear through the slender foliage. Even in winter a single ray of bright sunshine makes this a delightful nook.

It was thither the three repaired, Odile putting her sketches together in order as they went. Then, finding a convenient corner and seat, they set to their pleasurable task and lived old memories anew, delighted to recall scenes very dear to them all. Here were the lovely lakes of Italy, and there her cities—Florence, Milan, Naples, Venice, Rome. Here, too, were Sorrento, Pompeii, and Capri, followed in turn by seascapes of the homeward journey back to France, athwart the sparkling, silver-flecked,

Mediterranean blue. Each page, each name, evoked responsive memories of beloved scenes.

"Italy," said Odile, turning over the pages of an album, "is still so lovely, with its warm sun and unparalleled light, it is so rich in its overflowing gifts of nature and tremendous historical memories, that really nothing can spoil it—not even the Italians. It is the Holy Land of Europe—the latter-day soul of the world."

Jacques' traveling days dated somewhat farther back; and so he checked Odile's enthusiasm somewhat. He pointed out that over-strong impressions conceived in haste are not always to be trusted, and that the true memories which endure are those that have sunk more slowly into the mind. Italy was doubtless very beautiful, he said, but one's most abiding Italian memories were not of those things that had pleased best at first sight.

"If that is the case," said Odile, "not one of my recollections will be permanent, because I felt everything there was to feel quite quickly and deeply—as I always do, for that matter."

"As a rule you do. Yes, it must have been that way with you, Odile. You are keenly sensitive, so that any loveliness thrills you with delight, while an hour with no emotions in it closes you up like a flower. For all that, Odile,

I am quite sure that you do have very lasting memories and very deep-rooted affections, vigorously alive within you."

"Perhaps."

"I am sure of it. Your redeeming quality is that when your first impressions have disappeared, or, what is worse, been brushed aside as something of a nuisance, you have a way of retaining in your mind forever an abiding recollection of the happiness they brought to you. This recollection does not weary you, because it is always changing in the retrospect, like a picture in varying lights. It is affected and tinted by your feelings of the hour, and gradually merges into a wistfully regretted past, after having been part and parcel, in the first instance, of a hopeful future. Yes, you do change, Odile, in regard to very many things, and nevertheless you forget nothing. That has always struck me about you."

"Couldn't you make your meaning a bit clearer?"

"It is rather hard to do that, because some things are so much more easily thought than said. However, it seems to me, Odile, that your head is always ready to do duty as a kind of lifeboat for whatever your heart can't keep aboard any longer. Yes, I imagine your memory as a place where your heart maroons its

castaways—an island where, willy-nilly, you have to put ashore a whole lot of things you used to love quite sincerely once upon a time. You are like the people who never destroy an old album, but linger tenderly over faded old photographs, while all the time they really wouldn't care to see the originals of the portraits come to life again."

"Why, Jacques, I must be an extremely selfish person, then!"

"No, you are not. You are what the nerve-specialist people call a *souffrante,* that is all—a lady affected with the malady of the century. You haven't enough faith in the simple goodness of things. Your soul is hurt by all sorts of conflicting impressions. You are constantly finding out how perishable these impressions are and how deceitful is the mirage they throw up. And then all you have left is a disagreeable after-taste of the vanity of things, and you fall into the melancholy mood of all people who won't make a beginning, simply because they know they won't have much pleasure in going on. If you were only to exclude God from these constant misgivings of yours, you might pretty well become a saint."

"I don't understand you clearly," said Odile, hanging her head down. "What you tell me sounds very complicated, whereas I should like

so much to be simple, spontaneous. I am frightened myself at times by the unpleasant way an impression easily affects me. I can feel and be thrilled far too readily. When I come across certain kinds of beauty I tremble all over. And yet for all that I'm not much—just a little brook running down to the sea."

"Oh, not such a very little one," remonstrated Jacques good-humoredly.

"Yes, quite a little one, but able to reflect a good deal, because——"

"Because?"

"At any rate I understand myself," concluded Odile somewhat lamely.

"Perhaps that is hardly a sufficient reason," laughed Jeanne. "Hardly sufficient for us, I mean."

"It is sufficient, though. Why, my mind keeps company with every change in the sky, from white to blue, or from gray to black. This unison between nature and myself astonishes me. When the wind blows in the woods, and brings down the dead leaves all about me, I sometimes think that I belong to the forest, too, or that the trees themselves have some sort of a soul, able to talk to my own in a mysterious way. That is quite mad, isn't it, Jacques? Tell me truthfully what you think."

"Whatever it is, you are making too much

of it," answered Jacques. "However, ask the Abbé Hans about it."

"And then," resumed Odile, "you were quite right in what you were saying about my faith. My doubtful moods do occasionally include Providence. There are days when I seek God and find Him nowhere. Everything around me is in pitch-darkness and chaos, seemingly given over to mere blind chance. I go on and on, groping with both hands in the gloom, and expecting misfortune as my guest every day. Oh, this curtain, so inexorably drawn across the future! The absolute silence of God! And then the way nature neglects us—her automatic way of disdaining our poor human hearts! Jacques, why does God hide Himself as He does?"

"I see Him everywhere, Odile. I see Him always."

"Always?"

"Yes, always," said Jacques quite simply. "You ask where is God? Why, He is here, all around us. I perceive this—I know it. God may say to us sometimes what He said to Mary Magdalen, 'Touch Me not.' But this prohibition compels us to be up and doing. It makes us keep walking in His way, by night, perhaps, and with groping hands, but still we are advancing on and on, and we are *giving* love,

not merely receiving it. Now that is a beautiful thing, even in this world. What a grand sight, what an unspeakable joy, it must be to the blessed in Heaven, this quest of the Creator by the creature! In my own case, everything leads me to God, from the fragrance of the morning to the solemnity of the close of day. Only some hours ago, while you were still asleep, I was riding through the woods and admiring God's considerate kindness in giving all His creatures their winter garb. He is clothing every one of them against the cold days; the strongest, the weakest, the sensitive, the unconscious, the tiniest wren and the humblest bud, they are all being cared for. No, Odile, God is good, as you were saying in your letter from Italy. He is good, with a tender and watchful goodness and kindness. It is we who are bad—we who can not live without biting and tearing and killing one another."

"I tell you what," put in Jeanne, her womanly feelings ever so little alarmed by all these excursions into the great problems that have perplexed humanity for ages, "suppose we go on with the rest of the albums and have a little clearer weather to end up with?"

"Quite right, Jeanne," exclaimed Jacques. "That is quite obviously the proper thing to do. You are reasonableness itself!"

Thereupon they began to turn over album-pages again, and awaken the past once more. Odile drew very well, with considerable piquancy and original charm. She possessed in abundance the happy knack of sketching from life, although she had never made much effort to acquire it. Her excellent art-master, the worthy M. Pommeçon, a severe classicist, was inwardly appalled at times by the capricious fancies she was wont to throw on paper, all shadows and lights, without a single line. Still, in a few strokes of pencil or brush she could fix an impression with amazing fidelity, for she had an inborn sense of tones and values.

By way of more definite keepsakes for her friends Odile had brought back two gifts, which she proceeded to show, but without presenting them as yet, for she meant to deliver them at La Ferlandière with her own hands. There was a splendid piece of rough agate for Jacques and a delicate Venetian water-color for Jeanne, representing a sunlit balcony, reflected in the corner of a lagoon.

"I rather think the Vale won't see much of us to-day," remarked Jacques.

"Let it be to-morrow, then, without fail," rejoined Odile. "Yes, because I am in a woeful hurry to see for myself the extent of the mis-

chief and all the dreadful changes that have been made in the valley."

"But to-morrow is Sunday."

"All the better; we shall have a quieter time seeing things. Will after Vespers suit you, about half-past two?"

"Certainly. We'll call it a bargain."

So saying Jacques arose to give word for his coachman to put the horses to. But Aunt Bertha protested.

"You are going to dine with us," she said firmly.

"But——"

"There is no 'but' in the case."

The Squire accepted, and with such obvious pleasure that Jeanne, being roguishly mindful of what hours he kept, could not help saying with a laugh:

"If you take a stroll before dinner, Jacques, whatever you do, don't be late again this evening!"

CHAPTER IX

SUNDAY came, and splendid weather with it. At the time arranged, Jacques and his sister called for Odile at the church, and then, in order to extract more enjoyment from their two hours' drive in an afternoon of glorious

Indian summer, proceeded in the direction of the Vale by way of the older road, as being freer from traffic than the other, if not in as good condition. Besides, the Squire had decided to defer showing Odile the leather works now being put up with feverish haste at Frilleux and Brésolettes until the journey back along the newer road.

It was a very pleasant drive amid the calm, cool fields, already lightly powdered with hoar-frost and sparkling in the brilliant, level rays of a late October sun. The peasants were to be encountered here and there walking about in their Sunday best, their pipes in their mouths, their hands clasped lightly behind their backs. The course of these leisurely rambles invariably ended in another good look at the kindly earth they had been tilling the day before. The men seemed possessed with the instinct of love-lorn swains, who find themselves pining for another glimpse of the beloved the moment they part from her.

"Do you notice that?" said Jacques, pointing to the countrymen. "They remind me of sailors, who begin to fret for the sea when the voyage is only just over. It is a good sign, that, both for the men and for ourselves. If these good dispositions could only be made to last!"

When they had passed the Bois Roux and Blanc Buisson, and were once more heading for home by the new road, the scene was completely changed. Frilleux and Brésolettes had already the general appearance and bustling air of small commercial towns. All grades of workmen—laborers, masons, carpenters, locksmiths, and the like—were toiling away at breakneck speed upon the various factory buildings. Yet the hustling figures betrayed little or no true animation.

"But it is *Sunday,*" observed Odile.

"Sunday? Have you got no further than that, then?" said Jacques. "If you only knew how little M. Nathan and his railway company friends bother their heads about your precious Sunday."

"Still, it is something it will give me a good deal of trouble to get used to."

"But you *mustn't* get used to it, Odile. That kind little heart of yours must always leap with indignation whenever you see a laborer working on Sunday. Speaking for myself, I am really less upset by the sight of poverty, or sickness, or accident, than I am when I see a sturdy man constrained in his essential liberty *as* a man and compelled to bend his back to work that is plainly forbidden both by God and nature."

As they drove along unpleasant contrasts were to be met with everywhere, cheek by jowl. Smart, cleanly Sunday clothing rubbed shoulders with shabby workaday blouses, flecked with plaster and clay or grimed by work at the forges. Farm-hands were showing their placid, well-shaven faces beside weary-looking, sallow-featured workers, whose attempts at jovial remarks disguised very thinly the fact that they were both tired and envious.

"Only to think," whispered Odile, "that our horses at the Abbaye have one day's rest in three!"

"So do M. Nathan's," replied Jacques. "His *horses* get their rest."

"But, then, how about these workmen here?" the girl persisted with a questioning look in her big blue eyes.

"It is as simple as A, B, C. When a horse is killed with overwork, the mishap means a dead loss of fifteen hundred francs to his owners. But for every workman who tumbles off that scaffold there are ten or a hundred more ready to get up and take his place. And so it seems useless to employers of the Harmmster class to bother their heads any more about the man."

"Coldly reckoned up that way, it sounds awful."

"Men are worth no more than they believe. When they believe in nothing at all, like Messrs. Soupot and Nathan, the first thing to be forgotten by them is that the commonest laborer, the humblest hodcarrier, is our brother in Jesus Christ, and that, being such, he has the right of reserving one poor day in the week for prayer and rest and enjoyment of his family life. Forgetfulness of that is one of the causes why these men are being forced to work on a Sunday. There are others: By tethering the men to the factory from six in the morning onward, the employers can hamper the parish priest in his work. The men are sure not to go to Mass, because they are kept at the works till past Mass-time. And there are certain cowardly minds that find the most exquisite pleasure in the supreme delight of harrying a poor parish priest."

"To say nothing of the fact," added Jeanne, "that these people have absolutely made their minds up to finish their factories before the cold weather sets in."

"I am aware of that, my dear girl," said Jacques. "It is their main, plausible reason. There is nothing in it. Take it for a fact that all building-contractors are now privately agreed on one point, which is this: the high-grade work produced in a six-day week is equal

in quantity to the middling work turned out in a seven-day week. The workman who loses his day of rest works dreadfully badly, and even—well, well, there's one of them coming along at this moment who seems to be woefully in need of rest! Look out, there! How on earth is he going to get past us? Why, the driver must be mad!"

With these words Jacques reined in. A huge, four-horse dray, overloaded with bales of wood-fiber for the workshops, was coming full down upon him. Its axles seemed bending beneath the crushing load and the hard creaking of the wheels was singularly ominous. The driver had the sun full in his face. He had been dozing and was now fast asleep, his head bobbing lower and lower at every lurch of the dray. The vehicle was in charge of the horses, and presently jolted into a rut. The man's head ducked deeper and deeper, and one of his shoulders tilted forward. His body remained unstably poised for one sickening instant, and then, losing balance altogether, came crashing down with a thud between the hoofs and the off front wheel.

The three friends gave a simultaneous cry of horror. Jacques sprang to his feet, flung Odile the reins, and leaped over the backs of his own still gently moving horses into the midst of the

fallen man's team, at the imminent risk of a trampling. Thrusting the two leaders aside, he seized the bridles of the heavy, Boulogne-bred shaft-horses and stopped them dead—sent them plunging back, indeed, with fright. Unluckily for the driver underfoot, Jacques was just the fraction of a second too late. He had been able to bring the horses to a standstill, but the vehicle was on the move, the road sloped down, and the wheels could take yet another half-turn ere the breeching was brought against the horses' cruppers and the dray stood still. It was then that the grim thing happened. The wheel went slowly over the quivering wretch's arm, and blood spurted freely from the hideous fracture. . . .

A crowd formed at once around the scene of the accident. Some women came along, but were sickened by the sight and rendered helpless. A few hodcarriers, impelled by curiosity, came slowly and cautiously forward, not wanting to be summoned as witnesses. They dreaded above all things the tedious legal procedure which is by way of being the prosy epilogue to so many modern dramas of rescue and self-devotion.

With ill-grace they eventually set about lifting up the poor limp rag of a man, now wide awake indeed, and gazing with a great, silent

dread upon a bleeding, well-nigh severed forearm, that assuredly could never more help him to earn his daily bread.

It was then that Jacques, finding it no longer needful to stand by the horses' heads, came around to the side of the dray, making a way for himself through the knots of unknown workmen. They were still hesitantly looking at one another in a scared sort of way without speaking a word. Manifestly they were quite ignorant of what was to be done or how to set about doing anything. In point of fact, the situation was decidedly awkward. There was a fearful hemorrhage, and by the time a doctor was found the man might have bled to death.

Jacques rapidly scanned the groups in quest, at this intensely critical moment, of some strong, intelligent helper, who would not be unnerved by the screams the injured man was now emitting, and who could render first aid without shrinking from contact with blood. While he paused a moment in this silent search for a likely looking man among the strangers surrounding him, the crowd parted a second time and Odile stepped forward. Her face was very white, her teeth were closely set.

"Do you want me, Jacques?" she said.

"You?" he cried.

"Try me at any rate," she said.

Without awaiting his reply, the girl knelt beside the injured man, whose head was now pillowed against the Squire's knee. Tearing her own handkerchief and others into strips, Odile swiftly improvised compresses and bandages, and asked those standing idly by to pluck some handfuls of wood-fiber from the load on the dray. The request seemed to break the ice. Help was now freely forthcoming, and some women brought linen, which Odile bade them cut up for use as lint, as quickly as might be. Still kneeling, with cuffs turned back from her now blood-reddened hands, she asked the nearest bystander for a piece of wood to make a splint. They did not understand, and Odile then raised her eyes to where sat poor Jeanne, uneasily alone upon the box-seat, and having much ado to control her brother's horses, always apt to be skittish in crowds.

"Jeanne!" she cried. "Give me my umbrella."

"Your umbrella?"

"Yes, my umbrella."

With blind obedience Jeanne handed it down, and it was duly passed on to Odile, who got some one to open it and smash the stick out of it for her. Using this as a surgical splint, she deftly set and bound the broken arm, so that the doctor's arrival could now be awaited

without serious anxiety, even though the luckless driver had sustained a severe compound fracture.

From first to last the luckless drayman kept his haggard eyes despondently fixed on Odile. He took heed of nothing but the motherly offices rendered him by a mere girl, who showed no sign of weakness in the grim work to hand, but kept buoying him up and encouraging him, like some angel of charity, with brave, cheering words that almost lulled his pain away. At the Abbaye, she said, far graver hurts than his had been dealt with and perfectly cured. Yes, of course, the sight of blood was always distressing, but there were no bad after-effects from it—quite the contrary, in fact. It was really much better that the wound had bled so freely. Probably when his arm was carefully washed it would be found that the hurts were not nearly so grave as they might seem at first.

"There, now," she concluded, "lean back well on M. de la Ferlandière—so."

Her task thus ended, Jacques put in a word.

"Where do you live, friend?" he asked. "In the Vale?"

"Yes."

"Whereabouts?"

"In lodgings. I have rented a garret there."

"Quite so, but in what street, I mean."

"I don't know its name. I am a stranger in these parts."

"Is your lodging a good distance from here?"

"No, it is quite close to the railway station. The house belongs to a man called Soupot."

"Ah! I know the place. Would you like me to drive you there in my carriage?"

"Yes, but please break the news gently to my old woman first. She might have a fit, otherwise. What a misfortune! Nice thing, ain't it, this, with three children to keep?"

"Don't worry," said Odile. "We are not going to leave you in the lurch like that."

And then, with the help of one of the workmen standing by, Jacques lifted the injured man in his strong, quiet way and got him into a reclining position on the cushioned seat of the carriage. It was done so very gently that the sufferer hardly groaned as they moved him. The Squire then stepped back for a moment to Odile, beside whom Jeanne was now standing.

"If you don't mind," he said to them, "I shall leave you two here for the present and then drive back and pick you up again."

"Yes, but don't forget the poor man's address," warned Odile.

"His address is easy enough to remember,"

said Jacques significantly, as he took the reins. "He lodges at Soupot's."

To save jolting as far as possible, Jacques set the horses at a walking pace along the level turf verging on the highway. While he drove thus steadily in the direction of the railway station, Odile washed her hands in one of the wooden troughs standing hard by, made from hollowed tree-trunks and fed by the waters of the yet unsullied Jouine. While so doing—almost, indeed, ere Jacques had turned the corner and been lost to view—a landau appeared at the other end of the road.

"Hello!" said a laborer. "It is the governor! He has turned up the day after the fair."

And Nathan Harmmster it was, with Victor and Alberta, on their way to catch the fast up-train to Paris. The crowd had not yet begun to disperse and the carriage had to pull up. Nathan turned in his seat and leaned over the side.

"What's up?" he snapped.

A woman replied:

"One of your drivers has just been run over by this dray," she said.

"The fool!" exclaimed Victor. "He was drunk, I suppose?"

Nathan jumped down with much concern. His eyes spelt mischief. His hands kept

"Odile was like some angel of charity, with brave, cheering words that almost lulled his pain away."—*Page* 134

twitching restlessly in either pocket of his overcoat.

"How did this thing happen?" he said.

Cap in hand, the workmen approached him and told him the tale in a roundabout way, while Nathan fidgeted and peered hither and thither around him with blinking, inquisitive eyes. The dray yet stood where Jacques had pulled it up. The horses were scathless. The pool of human blood still lay in the roadway unabsorbed.

"Ah," said a workman, "only for the Count de la Ferlandière your driver would have been done for—yes, done for to a certainty, he would."

Suddenly Nathan's lowering face cleared up.

"Excuse me, my friend," he said to the man who had spoken, "I'll hear you again in a moment." Then he turned to two others close at hand.

"You work for me, don't you?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"What is your name?"

"Durand."

"And yours?"

"Choquart."

"Very well, you will act as my witnesses."

"Witnesses? Witnesses of what, sir?"

"Of *this!*"

And Nathan pointed imperiously to the broad blood-splash underfoot.

"That blood is not red!" he exclaimed. "It is violet-colored. No question of that, it is violet-colored."

"Father," put in Alberta, much bored by her present surroundings, "we shall miss the train."

"As for you, leave me alone, please. Business is business, I take it. Come here, Victor! You will be my witness, too. Is this blood violet in color or is it not?"

"I should just think it was," stated Victor, scenting profit from afar in an affirmative reply to what was a pointedly leading question. "It is absolutely violet. It is nearly blue."

"There is only one conclusion, then," said Nathan. "The driver was drunk!"

"No, sir," replied a workman, anxious to defend his comrade. "He was not drunk, sir. I daresay he was tired out and sleepy."

"Sleepy? What do you mean? People don't go to sleep at three o'clock in the afternoon. He was dozing off the effects of too much wine, that's what was the matter with him."

"It isn't fair to say that, Monsieur Nathan," protested the man respectfully, yet firmly. "Here we men have been working away on your factory buildings for seven weeks on end, days and nights, Sundays and feast-days——"

"Now, then, no more of that! If you were one of my own hands I'd soon let you have what you deserve! You are all alike. You all hold in together, but I shall hold you tighter at the finish, the whole lot of you. Just you wait till the factories are going, and then watch me bringing this district to its senses. Even as things are at present, I haven't the slightest intention of paying out a couple of thousand francs to a drunken fellow who goes and gets himself smashed up like this."

While he was speaking the gendarme on patrol duty turned up. The Jew made for him at once, and demanded the preparation of a written report then and there. His tones were those of a man who had owned the whole town since yesterday.

The gendarme began writing down from dictation, and meanwhile Alberta was listening absently to the talk of a little knot of women hard by. They were discussing the accident, with variations, and occasionally stole glances in the direction of Jeanne and Odile, who stood apart from the crowd awaiting Jacques' return. Fragments of their talk were distinctly audible to the young Jewess as she lolled contemptuously in her well-cushioned corner.

"To think that that delicate young chit of a girl from the Abbaye had such pluck! We

knew she was kind and open-handed, but wasn't she brave! She knew her business, too; she was like one of those regular Paris trained nurses."

In similar fashion Alberta learned all about the Squire's very strenuous attempt at a rescue. The women had seen him spring over his horses' heads with such a flying leap that they felt sure he would break his neck.

Upon this Alberta indulged in a prolonged stare at Odile. She had not been able to see her particularly well at Creil, but now the girl stood barely ten paces away, in excellent light.

"It is the rawboned young person," she mused, "who exploded in the refreshment-room, and stood up for M. de la Ferlandière. Well, well, suppose we take stock of her."

Then with the cruel eyes of all incurably conceited women she mentally picked Odile to pieces:

"Dress? Not bad. Her manner is certainly distinguished. But she is very pale, the small person from the Abbaye. Blond—sentimental—and consumptive!"

Whereas she herself was the reverse of all these things. Alberta felt stung by hatred and jealousy because her vigor and health were out-

poised by the seeming weakness now attracting every eye to this frail girl, standing out before the crowd like the fair damsel of some victorious knight. By-the-by, where *was* this knight? Alberta wanted to have a look at him. So her eyes went hunting for Jacques in the crowd. She felt she must recognize him easily if he were there. He was tall, they said, and—and that was really all she knew about his looks. Uncle Victor had drawn such preposterous caricatures of her future betrothed that her notions of his features and expression were all mixed up and indeterminate. In any case, he could not be far away, for the girls yonder had every appearance of expecting him at any moment. Dear, dear, when would this silly flock of women have done cackling? Of course, of course Odile was a saint, and the Count was a hero—so much must be taken for granted. But when would her father make up his mind to get away? What tale could he be possibly telling that enormous gendarme? And what a place it was for such a crowd to assemble, all on account of a laboring man who had gone and got himself squashed! Ah! There was Jacques! No. Perhaps that other man over there was he? But no, seemingly not. After all, what did it matter to her? Here was her father at last, decidedly not one minute too soon.

M. Nathan had finished with the gendarme and the report and now resumed his seat in a more tranquil frame of mind. The coachman touched up the horses, and could now get along with fair ease through the rapidly dispersing groups.

"It was lucky I arrived at the right moment, just in the nick of time," exclaimed the manufacturer, as he buttoned up his overcoat with a sigh of much relief. "Only for that I wouldn't have got out in the courts for less than six thousand francs."

"Are you aware," said portly Victor, addressing his niece, "are you aware that your devoted admirer, de la Ferlandière, has been polishing up his martyr's crown again?"

"Oh!" said Alberta, in a studiously indifferent tone.

"Yes. But he has certainly had a job in a circus some time or other, that chap! Can't be explained any other way. They've just been telling me how he sprang from his carriage like a deer and started punching our horses on the nose in the liveliest fashion. I hope he'll have a lighter fist for his dear little wife!"

"What has that to do with me?" asked Alberta, made sulky by her uncle's standing family joke.

"Oh, I was only thinking—" replied Victor.

The rest of his explanation was stifled in a mighty guffaw.

* * * * *

An hour afterward the road had resumed its normal appearance. The human tide flowed onward as bleak and uninspiring as the careless waves that close over some shipwrecked seaman and make mad sport on the spot where he had met with misfortune. Drays rumbled along from the Vale of Api and vehicles of all sorts from Brésolettes; laborers trudged by from Frilleux, and there was a whole mixed procession of countrymen in their best blouses, inquisitive urchins playing truant from home, and strangers from neighboring towns, who had taken a trip to see the factories. All these were steadily coming and going along the travel-worn road.

It would be only a few minutes when the last of the women would end their comments on what had happened; it would be all over—finished, forgotten, and buried away, as though it had never occurred. The nameless martyrology of the working classes had begun—a martyrology upon which only Christian souls, or souls worthy one day to become such, are willing to meditate.

Odile thought sadly of these things as she rested her head on Jeanne's shoulder while

the carriage took them rapidly in the direction of La Ferlandière, now glowing on the horizon in the gold and purple of the sunset. She was very pale after her recent excitement.

"My whole mind is overshadowed by this terrible thing," she said, as they drew clear of Frilleux.

"It seems," replied Jeanne, "that the Jew proprietor showed himself quite savage about what occurred."

"He did," replied Jacques. "That is the way with people who believe in nothing but their purses. Things are turning out just as I expected. A Christian employer would have acted very differently, and shown some tact and delicacy, whereas this man starts out brazenly by taking precautions against legal damages. Probably the poor driver isn't giving the matter of damages a thought. But even if the charge of drunkenness was justified—and it wasn't—M. Nathan was hopelessly wrong in the way he wanted to prove himself right. He will be simply dreaded hereabouts in future. He will find he can not establish his authority by bullying the people. Confound these fellows who believe in nothing but money and the law—the hard, dry letter of the law. I believe in a kind heart and love of our neighbor."

While he spoke thus Odile glanced up at him

from her seat with the far-away, other-worldly look that was so notable in her eyes at certain times.

"Only you see," Jacques continued, "the employer of the new-fangled type does not know the men he employs, and has not the slightest desire to know them, and still less to like them. They are just cog-wheels in the machinery, so far as such a master is concerned. Naturally, under such conditions—and they are conditions of his own making—he gets into a habit of dreading everything, and he is quite right. When you have nobody to love, you have every one to fear."

"It is so different from our way," said Odile.

"Oh, we have our enemies, too," returned Jacques. "There are people who are jealous and who begrudge us the happy home life they partly guess at, but wouldn't really be able to enjoy themselves. But then, to protect us against this hatred, we have our love, and love conquers everything."

"Even death?"

"Yes, it conquers death. Surely love—the true love that is worthy of human dignity—is between soul and soul. The body is merely an incident."

"Or an accident," murmured Odile.

"Perhaps so."

"In that case, friendship is higher than love?"

"Almost always. Except, however, when—"

Jacques was silent for a moment.

"There *is* an exception, then," resumed Odile.

"Yes, the case when friendship blossoms out in autumn from a love that budded in the spring. Do you know the very pretty poem on this subject by Rosemonde Gérard, Odile? It begins:

"'When thou art an old man, and I an old, old woman,
When golden tresses shall be silvered white'——"

"No, I don't know it."

"I'll repeat it to you some day at La Ferlandière."

"Why not repeat it now?" asked Jeanne. "Isn't the wonderful scenery we are passing through worth all the drawing-rooms in the world?"

"I don't know that I recollect the lines well enough now."

"Suppose you try," coaxed Odile.

Jacques slackened speed, and presently began to repeat Rosemonde Gérard's noble lines while they moved slowly onward along the silent road amid the dying splendors of the sunset:

"Et, comme chaque jour je t'aime davantage,
Aujourd'hui plus qu'hier, et bien moins que demain,
Qu'importeront alors les rides du visages? . . .

Mon amour se fera plus grave et plus serein.
Songe que, tous les jours, ces souvenirs s'entassent;
Mes souvenirs à moi seront aussi les tiens! . .
Ces communs souvenirs, toujours plus nous enlacent;
Et, sans cesse, entre nous, tissent d'autres liens! . .
C'est vrai, nous serons vieux très vieux, faiblis par l'âge,
Mais plus fort, chaque jour, je serrerai ta main!
Car, vois-tu, chaque jour je t'aime davantage,
Aujourd'hui plus qu'hier, et bien moins que demain,

* * * * *

Et de ce cher amour qui passe comme un rêve
Je veux tout conserver dans le fond de mon cœur:
Retenir, s'il se peut, l'impression trop brève,
Pour le ressavourer plus tard avec lenteur.
J'enfouis tout ce qui vient de lui, comme un avare;
Thésaurisant avec ardeur pour mes vieux jours;
Je serai riche alors d'une richesse rare;
J'aurai gardé tout l'or de mes jeunes amours! . .
Ains de ce passé de bonheur qui s'achève,
Ma mémoire, parfois, me rendra la douceur;
Et de ce cher amour qui passe comme un rêve,
J'aurai tout conservé dans le fond de mon cœur."*

* * * * *

"'For since each day my love of thee still groweth, greater to-day than yesterday, yet far less than the morrow's morn, what matter then if both our brows be wrinkled? My love will grow more tranquil, more serene. Think how each day remembrances are hoarding; these memories of mine will also be thine own. . . . For memories we share entwine us aye more closely, and ceaselessly are weaving yet other bonds of love. 'Tis true, we shall be old, yea old and age-enfeebled, yet closer, closer still I'll clasp thee by the hand, for see—each day my love of thee still groweth, greater to-day than yesterday, yet far less than the morrow's morn. . . .

"And so then this dear love which passeth like a dream, I vow to keep entire, deep buried in my heart. I'll hold, if so may be, its all too fleeting impress, to be enjoyed again, slowly, in after time. All I receive from love, I bury like a miser, and eagerly hoard up as treasure for mine age. Rich then I'll be, with riches of the rarest; I shall have kept entire the gold of

"Don't you think that is pretty, Odile?"

"Pretty is not the word. It is beautiful—too beautiful to be true, or to be always true for one and the same person."

"Why, what a skeptic you are, Odile!"

"What a dreadful name to give me! No, I am no skeptic, but you see there are black clouds around me still. This accident to-day has blurred my mind all over with blood and gloom. The poem you have repeated, though, *is* true—quite true, over *there*. You know where I mean—*there!*" And she pointed to the western heavens, where the crimson was now darkening into violet.

They remained silent for a space and let the calm of the evening beguile them from painful thoughts of the past hour. There was some breeze, for they were now mounting to the high ground near the Abbaye estate. The tall poplars along the wayside had now some chance of shaking off the dust of the weary day.

"I wish I could be like them," said Odile, "and forget everything I saw this afternoon."

"It will be much better to keep it in memory, believe me," said Jacques. "We may do some good for that poor man."

youthful love. . . . And so from out this past of blissful years now ending, kind memory at times shall waft me sweetest airs, and all this dear, dear love, that like a dream is fleeting, I shall have kept it all, deep buried in my heart."

"Certainly, and for any other poor unfortunate, whoever he may be."

They were then driving between two outlying fields belonging to the Abbaye.

"If the accident had happened here to-day," said Odile, "I would put up a wayside cross."

"The accident would not have happened here," observed Jacques. "Not to-day, at any rate."

"Why not?" asked Odile.

"Because it was an accident due to *Sunday* work, and because you and I are not going to allow Sunday labor on our land so long as we are alive to prevent it!"

CHAPTER X

ALBERTA came back from town next day and made a short stay in the Vale, spending most of her time in wandering, like a soul in pain, through the big rooms of the hired manor-house. It had been furnished in a hurry by a firm of Paris upholsterers. The stately old dwelling, with its seigneurial past, did not appeal to Alberta, and she could only go moping to and fro, between its unmeaning walls and flowerless vases, like the very Spirit of Ennui incarnate, stalking through realms of the commonplace. One day, a little earlier in this

story, the workmen being still in the house, she had been asked for advice concerning the drawing-room decoration scheme. The painters felt unwilling to take full responsibility in the matter. Alberta gave them such an amazing reception for their pains that they took in the situation at once. After that they went to Nathan Harmmster for all needed instructions.

Naturally Alberta became daily more and more unsettled in these unfamiliar surroundings, and soon made another start for Paris again, accompanied by her maid. She alleged as a pretext some more or less necessary shopping, with especial emphasis on the need of new accessories for her bicycle and motor-car. Alberta was an ardent "sportswoman," in the Parisian acceptation of that curious word, and it was most fortunate for all around her that she was so. Her care of her machines, carried to a point that nearly killed them with kindness, absorbed a solid hour daily, and the sixty minutes thus wasted were sixty minutes to the good in an empty, idle existence, in which all other hours, creeping slowly at each others' heels, were exquisitely tedious.

What really spelt ruin in this girl's life was the impossibility under which she labored of formulating any wish that was not at once fulfilled. Her nature was ardent, but its ardor proceeded

from bodily temperament rather than from emotion and impulse. She had been educated in one of the girls' colleges of approved State pattern, where the best professors dare not display their faith, for fear of affronting unbelieving parents, while the inferior teachers take care not to assail morality too openly lest they shock the vaguely Christian families who entrust their daughters to them. Alberta had drifted this way and that, like a spar from a wreck, in the cross-currents of conflicting opinions. She had ended by becoming a conceited little skeptic, who would fain not be wretched in her unbelief.

Nevertheless, there were hours when the girl took reckoning with herself, and experienced the keenest self-disgust at finding that at twenty-two she had neither desire nor aspiration, nor even much in the way of hope, and that she felt cloyed with everything before she had tasted anything. She was astonished at times to find herself shedding tears of mingled ennui and wicked bad temper without the least apparent cause. On a sudden she would feel overwhelmed by the weariness and futility of everything in her luxurious surroundings, and the tears would come. Indeed, it was largely in order to shun these spells of aching void that she went so often to Paris, seeking the feverish

activity of the capital as a kind of narcotic. On this particular occasion, as on other trips from the Vale to the city, she performed a sort of breathless pilgrimage from friend to friend, and salon to salon, attending every available society "function," from five o'clock teas and "At Homes" to theater-parties and balls. And whithersoever she went, her exasperated ears could hear nothing save one interminable pæan of gratulation upon her happy, happy lot:

"Ah, my dear, how happy you must be! You have all the good things that are going, and you have them all at once; you are as free as a bird, you have your home in a splendid part of the country, and yet within easy reach of Paris; you are an empress down there and a queen up here! You have only to drop your handkerchief and all the cleverest young men will be scrambling to pick it up."

Alberta had to hear all this, and to acquiesce therein. How, indeed, could she do otherwise without appearing rude? In society there is a feeling which warns people to shrink from letting others consider them unhappy, save on certain accepted standard grounds, while the very rudiments of conventional politeness demand that a girl's unconcerned acquaintances shall not be pestered with unsought and doleful confidences—confidences, moreover, that would

evoke no compassion whatever, but rather the reverse. Hence Alberta, in loyalty to the social code, offered sacrifice on the shrine of society conventions. Yes, she would admit, she supposed there was no denying it; she *was* a spoilt child of fortune; there *was* nothing lacking to complete her happiness; absolutely nothing. Yes, she had good looks, and good gowns, and fine horses, and fine family connections, and fine facilities for sport. She enjoyed, moreover, the flattering envy of the somewhat less well-to-do girls at Chauny, at La Fère, and at Saint-Quentin, who were doubtless already dreaming of her new hats and of the garden-parties she would probably give. Yes, indeed, she had every appearance of earthly happiness. All that was missing was the reality.

Thus it befell that Alberta suffered exquisite agony at the close of each social ceremony she attended. When she had left some crowded and stifling drawing-room, wherein, despite her naturally overbearing and ungovernable temperament, she had been stooping to all the dispiriting make-believe of society life, hardly knowing what on earth possessed her to do so, the girl would regain the open street completely fagged out and inwardly raging at her labor lost. Unstrung, depressed, and weary beyond imagining, she would shrewishly rail upon the

world. "How stupid the world is!" was a frequent soliloquy of hers on these occasions. "How two-faced, how mean people are!" Then ensconcing herself snugly amid the soft blue satin upholsteries of her carriage, she would sit gazing blankly before her, glad to be rid of all need for thought and utterance, and free at last to feel as disgusted as ever she chose. And yet—the paradox of it!—there were still odd moments when she felt madly enamored of Paris! It was even so. The atmosphere of society gatherings would get into her head, and she would again glut herself with all the wretched nothings and paltry futilities the metropolis had to offer.

Alberta herself would have found it hard to explain why the manly figure of Jacques de la Ferlandière appeared to her mind's eye during one of her jaded moods, as though summoned before her to complete a contrast. Was one reason to be sought in fat Uncle Victor's idiotic standing joke? Had the heavy sameness of that piece of humor ended up by making the object of it almost interesting? Or was the real cause her downright weariness of the pale, æsthetic striplings whom she ran against in decadent salons, uplifting the sallow whites of their eyes to rococo ceilings? Whatever the solution of this inscrutable feminine puzzle, the

facts remained. Alberta's thoughts kept turning, in spite of herself, upon Jacques de la Ferlandière, the wild man of the woods, whose name was never mentioned at home without an ironic remark and a shrugging of shoulders. The girl mused upon Jacques at times so intently that he almost became in her eyes a being of exalted intelligence, because he steered his own course in life without depending on others, and because the sole boon he craved from fashionable society was to have it ignore his very existence.

One afternoon in particular the dead weight of Paris lay especially heavy on Alberta's shoulders. Returning to the hotel from a drive in the Bois de Boulogne, she found awaiting her a letter addressed in her father's small, commercial hand. According to the contents, everything was going well at the factories. A new machine was being installed, and it had already cost the workman in charge a thumb. As for the driver who had been run over on the Frilleux road, "Vercingetorix" (i.e., the Count de la Ferlandière) had taken him into his service, a fact which had amused Uncle Victor greatly, who claimed that his candidate for Alberta's hand was now complete in every way. Further, a big order for footgear in all branches had come in from a Paris firm. Finally, they had

managed to make a deal with Jacques de la Ferlandière the unmanageable in the matter of the purchase of twelve yoke of white oxen, to be used in hauling loads of dressed skins and hides. The booby who sold them carried his silly sentiment so far that he loved the animals, and was interested in their future, and was arranging to come to the factory himself and give advice concerning the arrangement of the stalls and stable-fittings, his beasts being, it seemed, both powerful and easily frightened.

Why did Alberta pay especial attention to this closing passage of the letter? She could not have told why, but she suddenly experienced an overmastering desire to see this much-talked-of Jacques, and to be there before him when he came to the factory-yard.

She was not a girl accustomed to lengthy delays between desire and realization. Within five minutes she had rung for her maid and had her trunks packed.

"But, Mademoiselle," observed Anna, "those two boundary flags you ordered have not been delivered yet."

"Very well; they will be sent on."

"And the things Mademoiselle bought at the Louvre and the Bon Marché!"

"They can be sent on, too."

"I hope nothing has gone wrong in the Vale of Api."

"No. What a question to ask!" snapped Alberta.

"I only asked because Mademoiselle seems in such a hurry to get away."

"Well, let us stay in Paris, then!" pettishly exclaimed Alberta, vexed at being caught in a whim on which, for once, her mind was really set. But the maid begged her pardon and wept. She had really asked the question without knowing why, she said, and only out of anxiety for Monsieur's family, and even now she could not understand why Mademoiselle should take it so to heart.

It did not take Alberta long to see how ridiculous and inconsistent her outburst had been. She changed her mind accordingly. This having been done, only a few minutes before starting for the station, the missing marking-flags turned up, and their arrival seemed to simplify the whole situation.

"Coachman! Drive to the Northern Railway!"

As she tripped to the carriage Alberta almost shouted the words, and so gleefully that for the second time that day Anna stared at her mistress, completely bewildered.

During the drive to the station the girl for-

got her peevishness of the past three days, and was quite delightfully good-humored. She found the façade of the Opéra superb in the glow of the setting sun; she noted a pretty gown here and there; she all but smiled at the flower-girls, who took advantage of a block in the traffic to come to the carriage window hawking their heavy bunches of bright chrysanthemums. The horse, however, seemed to be crawling, and his steady pace kept her fidgeting till she reached the station, twenty minutes before time, afraid that she was late, and at no pains whatever to disguise the fact.

This mood changed abruptly when she had taken her seat in the train. Wrapping her traveling cloak about her, she sat quite still, and grew almost meditative. Only then did she realize the strangeness of her conduct and endeavor to examine her feelings, after a fashion. One thing was clear. She wanted to see Jacques the following day. After a surfeit of pastry she was hungry for plain bread and butter. Now Jacques was not only good, standard bread, as it were, he was also—oh, joy of joys!—an enemy; nay, *the* enemy.

Alberta felt surging and swelling within her an enormous curiosity to know this man personally. She craved to find out for herself what manner of man it was for whom that girl down

at Creil could trample underfoot all society conventions in a public refreshment-room—a man, too, who passed in the Vale for a mad, moonstruck lover of the land.

Yes, she reflected, he must be of different fiber from the weary weaklings of the Paris salons. She regarded him almost as a species of wild flower with a peculiar fragrance as yet quite new to her, and it was precisely the difficulties she knew would arise in the matter of plucking this flower that lured her on and on. She wanted it. She was determined to have it.

Just then an abominable stench invaded and pervaded the whole compartment. Alberta was leaning forward to the carriage window, and the express had been passing slowly through Saint-Denis—very slowly, as though to give every passenger the fullest flavors of that awful town.

The girl scanned the once blithe, historic city, now gray and shabby, with its mean little houses, its tattered specimens of the lamentable week's washing hung out of window to dry—like iron-molded banners of abjection in the royal light of afternoon—its leprous streets and its factory chimneys, blackening the horizon with their smoky banners. These great piles seemed like huge graveyard monuments, reared upon the ruins of the poetry of the

world. To the right, the cathedral belfry seemed dolefully sleeping the sleep of the dead who lay beneath its shelter. In the canal a filmy current of foul water oozed slowly along, as though thoroughly ashamed of itself. On the foreshore, slimy with greasy backwash, there were tatterdemalion figures loafing with slouching gait, hands deep in pockets, and cigarette fag-ends glued to their lips, watching some small fry playing a game of tag.

Alberta let her eyes wander over the wretched scene, made doubly depressing by the dead sameness of all working-class urban dwellings.

A house—a back-yard—a wash-house. A house—a back-yard—a wash-house. A house—a back-yard—a wash-house; it was ever and always the same. Nothing beautiful, nothing personal, nothing distinctive. Everywhere the same flat level of equality in prose, the same gloomy tone of the same commercial brick-work that looked as though it might have been kneaded in the claypits from the very heart's blood of all the world's tedium and wretchedness.

The scene was steeped, moreover, in a heavy and dust-laden atmosphere, reeking with the mephitic stench of chemical products. Here and there appeared openings in high boundary-walls through which glimpses were afforded of

some Satanic kitchen at work—gigantic furnaces, colossal steel engines and the like, amid which ran to and fro certain murky or khaki-colored pigmies, who on a second glance had something human about them.

The train now sped onward. The scenery became more rural, though it was not the true country as yet. Still, when nature could once more smile in the clear sunlight, the contrast brought back Jacques to Alberta's mind. His image returned and remained as persistently as a face that haunts one in a dream.

Alberta dreamed her daydream out, and so thoroughly withal that when the Vale was reached she had to be told so by her maid.

"Mademoiselle!" said the much-wondering Anna. "We are there!"

All was bewilderment at the chief factory when Alberta was seen coming afoot around the corner of the sordid street, followed, at some distance, by her maid.

"But why didn't you let us know?" exclaimed her father, when she had reached home. "If you had telephoned I could have sent the carriage to meet you at the station."

"What was the use?"

"Still, after all, why are you back so soon?"

"I have attended to all my commissions."

"Did you see the manager?"

"No."

"Did you see the editor of the *Défense?*"

"No."

"Madame Lareine?"

"No."

"Madame Pierrafeu?"

"No."

"Then I don't understand. You say you made your round of visits. You are not ill, I suppose?"

"Ill? Not the least little bit in the world. I have never been better in my life."

So saying, Alberta broke into a peal of laughter and went upstairs.

Meanwhile, in the servants' quarters, poor Anna was being besieged with questions. It was in vain that she uplifted protesting hands and swore by whatsoever she believed in that she knew nothing at all, at all. As usual in such cases, this procedure only succeeded in convincing everybody that she shared the mysterious secret. All the rest were fain to admit they had not the faintest inkling of any explanation that could explain.

Alberta's bedroom was a fine, spacious apartment, which would have been also a bright and airy one were it not for the dust driving along from the factory, which made it necessary to keep it closed up. Two of the windows

opened on the fields behind the house, and from the balcony attached—quite bare and destitute of flowers, which Alberta cared little about—a clear view was afforded of the highway stretching from Brésolettes to Saint-Quentin, and of a further road, or field-track, winding over the landscape to the Abbaye and thence to La Ferlandière.

Although late to bed and late to rise as a rule, Alberta got up at six o'clock next morning, threw on a morning wrapper, and opened her bedroom window. She stood for a few moments gazing over the fields, and then went out and took her place, like a gray ghost, upon the balcony.

The morning was divinely calm. Scarcely a blade of grass stirred in the meadows, while from far away, through the stillness of unawakened nature, came the first faint piping notes of a bird or two, falling singly upon the silence, like the sound of some tiny rill pouring drop by drop into a lake.

It was the first time Alberta had seen the country at this hour. She stood spell-bound. Leaning on the coping-stone, she looked out before her to where, beyond the Fumeçon hamlets, lay a mass of dark verdure, behind which appeared red roofs. It was there——

What was there?

"I am a fool!" said the girl to herself, stepping promptly inside and closing the window.

But for all that, she began to muse, while dressing, upon the strangeness of the turn events had taken.

"To say that I—*I*—Alberta, am risking a cold for a—for a fellow I do not know! No, I am not myself. Alberta, my dear girl, you are silly—you are a fool!"

Nevertheless, she spent two good hours at her toilette this selfsame morning, instinctively arranging everything with the utmost simplicity, though in reality the product of exquisite artifice. Consequently, as Victor might have expressed it in his horse-talk, she was really "in the pink of condition" when she came down to breakfast. Her wealth of rich, raven hair looked really wonderful and the crisp silk of the plain gown she had chosen set off her figure to advantage, while leaving her light in every movement.

"Why, darling," exclaimed her father, "you look quite delightful this morning!"

"Yes, don't I?" she replied absently, proffering her forehead to be kissed.

"And it is all for poor darling papa you have made yourself so nice?" continued the Jew.

"For whom else?" queried Alberta. She was a perfectly self-possessed girl, and her eyes

could lie with an appearance of perfect sincerity.

"For nobody else, that is true," pursued Nathan. "I am not expecting my shooting party for another ten days, and your cousins have gone away. So since it is all for me, come and let me give you another kiss."

Alberta took a hasty cup of tea, nibbled at a slice of dry toast, and then betook herself to her room again. Arranging a writing-table in a strategic position commanding an unimpeded view of the road, she opened her letter-case and started writing to her friends. Those friends, however, must have possessed small interest for her this morning, because her eyes kept constantly leaving the note-paper before her and looking out upon the distant fields between the Abbaye and La Ferlandière, now brightly shimmering in the morning haze. By ten o'clock she had lost patience, and took her stand at the window again, biding her time as best she could, but never once shifting her steadfast gaze from the home-farm at La Ferlandière.

This time she had serious self-communings. What could this almost appalling emotion be, that she felt tumultously swelling within her? A pampered and unsentimental girl, and one, too, who had been bred without faith in God or man, she had never experienced the like be-

fore. It was a new thing to her—a sweet and masterful thing, a pain of impatience, a weariness of waiting while the slow hours followed in each other's train and seemed beating time and measure to her immeasurable desire.

"So I am to see nothing at all along the Saint-Quentin road!" she complained.

Next moment a scarcely perceptible dot appeared on the sky-line. Alberta picked up a pair of field glasses and then put them down again peevishly almost at once. The strong lenses had revealed nothing more romantic than the notary and his clerk driving Valeward in a ramshackle conveyance known locally as a "mussel-boat." When the prosaic apparition had duly disappeared, not a soul was to be seen for the rest of the morning along the road topping the crest between the Abbaye and La Ferlandière.

Alberta went slowly down to luncheon at five minutes past twelve. Her shoulders drooped as though the weight of the world lay upon them. Indeed, she was so crushed and overwhelmed by ennui that her father himself, busy man as he was, could not help noticing it.

"What have you been doing, locked up in your room all the morning, darling?" said he.

"Why—to begin with, I wasn't locked in."

"Oh, I thought you were. I knocked twice as I went by your door, and you didn't answer."

"I was probably at the window," said Alberta absently. "It was a very fine morning."

"It is certainly a splendid day so far. It will probably be quite hot this afternoon. I don't mind. Perhaps my rheumatics will give me a holiday."

"By the way—" and Alberta's face was a mask of sheer impassivity as she spoke—"aren't you expecting some oxen that you bought to-day?"

"No. They came yesterday."

"Where did you buy them?"

"Why, at La Ferlandière. Didn't I tell you so in my letter?"

"I daresay you did," replied Alberta, cutting a pear in half with slow deliberation. "But then, you know, that sort of thing doesn't interest me in the least."

And they talked about something else.

CHAPTER XI

"Messieurs Nathan and Victor Harmmster have the honor of inviting you to spend the evening with them, on Wednesday, December 14th. R.S.V.P.

"Dancing."

JACQUES turned the pasteboard slip between his fingers again and again with the air of a very much puzzled man. And then, as though he had reason to suspect some postal blunder, he dived and retrieved the envelope from the waste-paper basket, only to find that the invitation was really and truly addressed to himself.

"These folks," he murmured, "are decidedly thick-skinned. The report of the last Town Council meeting, however, ought to have taught them what I think of them. So I shall not go. And there's an end of it."

With these words Jacques, having finished his morning's mail, got up from the table with the air of a man whose mind is quite made up.

There was a fine, crackling frost, and the farm bailiff came over early to ask Jacques to go and shoot a monstrous wild boar that had been rooting in the potato-pits for the past fortnight with exasperating regularity.

"Where is your boar?" asked Jacques.

"Half an hour's walk from here, down beyond the Jouine, in the little woods that border on the beetroot fields."

"Very well. I'll kill him for you."

"The sooner the better," observed the headman.

"Very well, perhaps to-day, then."

As he spoke and the man withdrew, Jeanne entered the room bearing a bunch of holly, whose berries scarce rivalled the ruddy glow of her cheeks in the crisp morning air.

"Well, Jacques," she said, "did you see it?"

"See what?"

"The invitation card from the—the—how do you pronounce that name? I never learned any German."

"The Harmmsters?"

"That's it."

"Did you get an invitation, too?"

"Yes."

"Those shoemakers seem to want to scrape acquaintance. We must be on the lookout."

"Perhaps," said the girl, "there is a friendly feeling at the bottom of it."

"Don't depend on mere guesswork, Jeanne. However, it takes two to play at making friends."

"You are for refusing the invitation, then?"

queried Jeanne, rather less indifferently than her brother had anticipated. He studied her face and laughed.

"Are you interested in their small family soirées?" he ventured.

"Yes," conceded Jeanne frankly. "I should like of all things to see them dancing on their native heath, so to speak, and find out how they get along with one another. That stout Victor must be a study—the most suggestive study of the three! I would like him to take me down to dinner!"

"Ah, you women, you women, you are nearly all the same," lamented Jacques good-humoredly. "To satisfy your curiosity you are still ready for any apple from any tree. To begin with, I would like to know if the Abbaye——"

"Ah, the Abbaye—that puts the case in a different light. Shall I ride over and find out?"

"I'll go with you."

It was Jeanne's turn to stare a little and laugh.

"It is *rather* early in the morning, my dear boy."

"True," replied Jacques in a disappointed tone. "So go yourself—off with you at once."

"I will," replied Jeanne, adding sweetly, "that is, if you can generously spare me time to put on a riding-habit?"

She got back an hour afterward, to find Jacques and the mayor walking up and down the lawn, deeply engaged in conversation.

"Well?" asked her brother, as he helped her to alight.

"They have heard nothing at the Abbaye," she said.

"There, now, Etienne," said the Squire, "you see for yourself that I simply *can't* go."

"Monsieur Jacques," replied the mayor, "you ought to go, because if you do not, you become responsible for creating a class feeling in the district. You will be the man who has repulsed advances and fired the first shot."

"I don't understand," said Jacques.

"Why, yes you do," protested the mayor respectfully. "Look at it in this light. These invitations, so far as concerns the guests from the Vale itself, are simply and solely official. Monsieur Harmmster wanted to keep out the crowd, and to do that he had to draw the line severely. If he had invited even one of the townsfolk here, all the rest would have had their knives into him."

"Are they so keen as all that on his soirée?" asked Jacques.

"Keen beyond words. First and foremost there are the womenfolk, who always want to know people's doings——"

"You hear that, Jeanne?"

"And then the men who have dreams of squeezing themselves into the Government departmental circles, where the Harmmsters have influence. It stands to reason that these two gentlemen cannot invite every one, and so they will receive only the recognized public men of the district, who have direct official relations with the factories, and, of course, their own personal friends from Paris. That is why the two ladies at the Abbaye were not invited. Surely you can see that there is nothing in the conduct of the Messieurs Harmmster to give offense."

"Oh, as for the two ladies," replied Jacques, "I feel sure they must be delighted to be left off the list. They have been spared a case of conscience, and a stiff one!"

"Perhaps so, but you are only stating my case in other words. It is not M. de la Ferlandière whom they are inviting; it is the town councillor of the Vale of Api."

"And he will not go," persisted Jacques.

"I beg leave to differ with you there; he *will* go," resumed Etienne, with that quiet note of authority so common among elderly French farmers. "You made use of your unquestionable right, and better still, Monsieur Jacques, you did your clear duty in opposing the vote for the factories, and these two gentlemen can

not reasonably bear you ill-will for your action at that time. But as things are now, the situation is totally different. The factories have been voted and built, and they are about to be opened. You have got to face a final crisis. An offer is made to you—and this invitation is proof of it—to let both parties work together side by side in peace instead of flying at each other's throats and tearing each other to pieces. Don't you think, Monsieur de la Ferlandière, that with the higher interests of the district in view it has become simply impossible for you to refuse the hand of friendship that is now held out?"

"Even a hand belonging to a Jew?"

"There are Jews and Jews, as there are eggs and eggs. I have known some very good Jews."

"And so have I. But I have already seen these Vale Jews at work. Their factories are not yet open, but their hands are red with blood."

"Perhaps you are too hard upon them, Monsieur Jacques. Besides, who knows but your personal influence might have a good effect on these men?"

Whereat Jacques laughed very heartily.

"Etienne," he said, "you plead like a guardian angel, but what you are asking costs me

a great deal. However, I would not like to hurt you for a mere act of courtesy, which, after all, as you say, binds me to nothing. I shall put in an appearance at the function, then, but the moment you see me coming in you can say to yourself, 'He is coming for my sake, and for the peace of the district.' "

"Thank you!" said the mayor, putting out his hand with the effusiveness of the simple, kind-hearted man that he was.

"So that is settled," said the Squire. And then, by way of giving the mayor a hint that the interview was closed, he began teasing Jeanne about the preparations required.

"Get ready, Jeanne," he said. "I want you to be as pretty as a peach that evening—pretty enough to eat!"

"Easy said," observed good-humored Jeanne. "Well, I'll struggle against the elements!"

Etienne then took his leave, and departed gravely on his round of reconciliation. Jacques studied his retreating form with considerable sympathy.

"That dear, good creature!" he said. "He hasn't the faintest notion that next year his two new friends will pitch him out of office by way of thanks. And he will be a lucky fellow if that is the worst they do!"

* * * * *

By common consent of all the inhabitants the Vale of Api was no longer the same. Since the coming of the Harmmsters one change had seemed to follow another with the speed of events in a dream. First there was a to-do about the factories, and now there was a to-do about the fête. Stout Soupot, indeed, was losing flesh over *that*, to the eyes of all beholders. He was to be encountered everywhere, puffing, blowing, and mopping his brow along every road, while taking mysterious measurements. He was literally all over the landscape.

Soupot, in fact, was in great measure personally responsible for the pageantry of the festivities. He had been allowed to go ahead on his own lines as a sort of expert in the matter of amusements for the multitude, having served ten years behind the bar in a flourishing saloon at Courbevoie, the market town. Full of zeal to justify the confidence reposed in him, he was also most especially desirous to sell as many bitters and cocktails as possible without detriment to the pageant. He took no chances, therefore, but went into the minutest details. With his own hand he indicated where the greasy poles should go; and it was he who decreed that the guests must drive to the Harmmster's house at Frilleux under fourteen tri-

umphal arches, no more, and no less. Here and there, of course, he chose sites for temporary branch establishments of his café, in the guise of portable wooden huts, sent down from Paris in pieces, to be screwed together in a couple of hours. His satellites could vend cognac therein, with wine and varying brands of absinthe, and all manner of other things likely to enkindle enthusiasm and irrigate dusty throats. Should their absorption render it impossible for the bulk of the crowd to walk straight from the first to the fourteenth arch of triumph, so much the better.

For fear the public might not turn up in sufficiently large numbers for the liquor he proposed to sell, Soupot secured from the railway company, by means of the Harmmsters, two special trains to the Vale, one running from Saint-Quentin, the other from Creil, picking up passengers at Compiègne and Noyon.

Meanwhile the "wooden horses"—that familiar feature of all French country fairs—were being put up in plowlands worthy of better crops; the wheatstacks at Frilleux were pulled down and carted away, for fear of the fireworks and the risk of a general blaze if the straw were set alight; finally, the huge silk cover of the balloon hired for the occasion

"Down came the rain . . . as though it meant to go on until the end of the world."—*Page* 178

dangled flabbily from its perch in the corner of Nathan Harmmster's grounds, where the miller's barn had once stood.

The town-hall square was the scene of the greatest havoc. Soupot had divided it in two and covered one part with a canvas awning for the band, while he floored the other with planking for the convenience of dancers. Well pleased with his work, the publican went this way and that amid the scurrying carpenters, his hands in his pockets and his hat well tilted back. Yes, the Vale was now ready for twenty thousand excursionists. If only the weather kept dry!

Small wonder, then, that at peep of day on the fateful December 14th Soupot made it his business while dressing to study the sky through his dubious window panes. Results gave him cause to pull a wry face. Gray, lowering clouds were drifting in the west and a wind ominous of rain piped shrilly in his narrow chimneys. Soupot swore. It was really a stroke of beastly bad luck. Everything had been got ready and expenses had been incurred. He was really risking a lump sum of several thousand francs, which he was none too sure the Messrs. Harmmster would refund, because for some weeks past he had been finding it harder and harder to get them to settle

his peculiar accounts. Where would he be if it rained, after all!

However, the first excursion train to arrive was full of a crowd of rural trippers determined to "make a day of it," and carrying the day's provisions, accordingly, in baskets on their arms. But at ten o'clock the wind went down and it began to drizzle softly—ever so softly at first. And then down came the rain—a quiet, steady, fine, cold rain, falling slowly, without fluster, as though it meant to go on until the end of the world.

Desolation covered the face of the land. The whole view of the valley was shut off by a curtain of dismal gray, through which only the nearest poplars on the Frilleux road loomed fitfully.

The mid-day trains came in still fairly full. Soupot stood in his doorway, with a napkin thrown over his shoulder, and welcomed the guests brought along by his waiters.

"What weather! What beastly weather!" So spluttered the countrymen under their wet moustaches, as they came from the station, their blouses streaming as they walked. Once under cover, they stamped vigorously upon the stone flagging of the café with their hob-nailed, iron-tipped shoes, to kick off the lumps

of clay adhering to the soles after their tramp through the sodden country lanes.

"It will all pass over!" cried Soupot again and again. "I know this part of the country, I do. I'll bet you anything that by two o'clock it won't be wet outside at all, but you'll all be wet inside by way of a change, eh? and so shall I. Hang it all, we're not in the world to have a dull time, I reckon? Cheer up!"

And the irreverent scamp would even quote the pious French proverb, which says that rain in the morning checks no true pilgrim:

"Pluie du matin
N'arrête pas le pèlerin."

He generally followed this up with an insinuation that assuredly had nothing to do with the case. "What'll you have?" he would query. "What is *yours*, please?"

But the peasants were not so easily satisfied. The dreary rain had spoiled their tempers, and they sat out under Soupot's awnings, patted their stiff new blouses, put down their black silk caps on the tables nearest to hand, and called for cards and dominoes.

Behind the bar Soupot was the best of good fellows, but once inside his kitchen he swore like a trooper. "Here's weather," he informed the servants. "Beastly weather. Blasted weather." And for the twentieth time that

day he took meteorological observations through the streaming window panes. Everything in sight was sopping, soaking wet. The colored glass lamps for the illuminations were full and brimming over, while further along to the left of the road the unhappy balloon hung between earth and sky, a most depressing object, suggesting a monstrous nursery biscuit that had been left in soak too long.

The wind chopped around toward three o'clock. There were two or three generous farewell showers, and then the clouds, although by no means disposed to make room for the blue sky Soupot had predicted, at any rate afforded him, by their improved behavior, belated opportunities of pushing trade among the customers.

The crowd soon commenced to spread here and there along the slushy roads. A few venturous couples essayed the dancing-floor in the town-hall square. The planks responded to their weight by squirting water between the chinks, with a vigor suggesting that dancers that evening might find it either difficult to glide along smoothly, or else just a little too easy.

For the most part the wandering groups made their way to the factory buildings, where they discussed the area of ground occupied by

the sites, the thickness of the walls, and especially the height of the chimneys. The long rows of tar-coated cast-iron water-mains, not yet sunk in position, but trailing like great black snakes along the wayside, appealed to the bucolic sense of humor. The sightseers tapped the resonant tubes with their sticks approvingly. "These would make fine pipe-stems," they said. "Yes, famous pipe-stems."

Thence they proceeded, in twos and threes, with the heavy tread of men used to work on the land, and as slowly as though they were following a funeral, making explorations along the two main roads. The newer road was favored by the greater number, and progress along it was enlivened at intervals by such cries, incessantly repeated, as "Who will have an absinthe? Who will have some cognac? Coffee, fifteen centimes a cup, all hot, all hot!"

The converging groups unanimously halted in front of the Harmmster's residence at Frilleux, where the Prefect was due that night for the dinner and reception. The crush at this point was great, and caused an overflow on both sides of the road into the factory yards and the adjacent meadows. The house itself and the new buildings near at hand were decked with tricolor flags, alternating with the municipal shields of various towns in the

neighborhood: Guiscard, Ham, Saint-Quentin, Tergnier, Chauny, Noyon, and others. The mass of bunting in the national red, white, and blue, and the brand-new tin escutcheons, sent down from Paris the day before, looked well washed out and second-hand already. In conjunction with their background of glaring whitewash they gave what was once a delightful country nook the air of some remote residential suburb in course of construction. To complete the illusion, what sounded like dinner horns were being blown in every direction, the inevitable gymnastic societies having sent their competing teams along, the "Avengers" in red belts and the "Valiants" in blue.

From five o'clock onward a set of young men who deemed it amusing to feign to be drunken conscripts kept parading the muddy road, singing, "Men of the Mountain," the dubious ditty which in France, when the populace is on the spree, most generally preludes a succession of other songs still less adapted to ears polite. What with the wet weather and the hooliganism, the Vale of Api began to look like the outskirts of some second-rate French market town on certain festive Sunday evenings. Soupot took heart at the sight and began to light the fairy-lamps.

At seven o'clock the Prefect arrived at the

station, where he was met by Nathan and Victor Harmmster and their board of directors. Alberta, almost sick at heart, and scornful beyond expression, remained at home, ostensibly to supervise arrangements for the reception, but really because she revolted against the whole nauseous business of parading before the crowd to advertise the firm.

There was speech-making at the station in the waiting-room, and more of it at the mayor's official residence. They drank a bumper of champagne to the good fortune of the factories, which the Prefect announced his intention of defending against all comers—doubtless including Jacques. He then proceeded to propose a second toast, to the health of "those hardy pioneers of civilization, Messrs. Nathan and Victor Harmmster (loud cheers), who with a strenuous hand were planting the banner of industry and progress on a soil dear to the hearts of them all"—with a good deal more to the same effect. Honest Etienne, the mayor, who was little used to departmental high comedy, very nearly shed tears over the stuff and looked everywhere for Jacques, who at that particular moment happened to be tranquilly seated in the gun-room at La Ferlandière, intent upon preparing cartridges to shoot the wild pig and his comrades.

After the double exchange of congratulations, the powers that were got into landaus and were duly driven to the new headquarters of N. & V. Harmmster, Limited, at Frilleux, under fourteen woebegone, ill-lit triumphal arches, and amid the hired cheering of sundry loafers engaged by Soupot to stimulate the leisurely lungs of the peasant-folk.

Alberta awaited their arrival in the main salon, all the appointments of which were in undeniable good taste. She succeeded in assuming so distinguished a grand manner that even already, ere the full tale of guests was told, a whole court of admirers had gathered around her. The dandified little "intellectuals" down from Paris were screwing their eye-glasses into position and whispering, "Why, Daddy Nathan never told us that he owned such a sprig of a daughter as this!"

"Ah, dear boy," said a pale youth of their number, "when a Jewess does go in for being beautiful, you know, she—" The sentence ended there.

Unquestionably, the worn-out little rakes dotted up and down the suite of rooms, now overflooded with the brutal glare of electricity, found Alberta most alluring in her trailing gown of emerald-green velvet silk, a confection which rather trumpeted than sheathed her

far from ethereal beauty. The young men of the cliques now fully felt her power to stir the one chord left thrilling in the youthful ruins of their old, old hearts.

Still, it was with a certain cool graciousness and detachment, if not altogether with disdain, that Alberta received her father's guests. A careful observer would soon have noted that she was working against the grain. Her lips wore the perpetual smile that signifies neither welcome nor contempt, but is simply and solely an absent-minded concession to standard etiquette, a mechanical movement of facial muscles out of which the soul, for the time being, has fled. For her thoughts were otherwhere. Alberta knew that Jacques would surely come, because he had replied to that effect on his sister's behalf and his own. She had even pinned his note of acceptance to the mirror on her dressing-table, very much as a soldier might keep the first stray bullet fired in action, or a lover preserve a first flower, which may or may not bear a tender significance and prove a mystic index to the future. Although the time he had mentioned for his arrival was not yet come, the headstrong girl felt conscious of not only an all-mastering desire to see him, but also—what was passing strange in so hard and strong a nature—of

considerable agitation at the prospect of confronting this Jacques de la Ferlandière, the "lover of the land," whom every one talked so much about, and with whose soul, she thought, her own soul was already in communion.

It was this feeling that was bringing the warm, peach-like tints to her cheek and causing her to open and shut the fan in her hands so restlessly. It made her drop her eyes every now and then abruptly. At these moments it was as though she must veil from the humdrum males around her the ardor of a gaze that beamed too brightly for neutral surroundings, where commonplace official and other guests might somehow perceive that such blazing and jewel-like flashes were assuredly not for them, nor for any weak-kneed nobodies of their type.

Yes, in a very few minutes she would be meeting this Jacques, the wild nobleman, the butt of Uncle Victor's heavy jokes, her father's open foe, and the source of his daily anxieties—above all, the man whom *that other woman* loved. She would be talking to him, and hearing his voice, and meeting his gaze. What wonder, then, that with a mind and heart so distracted the compliments of her courtiers were lost upon her, like the foolish huzzas of a mob beneath empty balconies and deserted palace windows. By an odd freak in the way of

contrasts, the particular Parisians paying court to Alberta this evening were either elderly men of some celebrity or youthful beaux of none. She had no choice between scientific experts and specialists in cravats. The girl was encircled by a ring-fence surmounted by the baldest of polls and likewise by the most luxuriant of scalps, well scented and trimmed in the latest fashion. Yet she kept peering over them, looking out for a specimen of real wild nature.

Moreover, as if in virtue of some strange and telepathic communication of thoughts, every guest in the room had something to say about Jacques to Alberta. They told her about his campaign against the factories, then in progress, or soon to be launched; they spoke of the awkward position in which he would assuredly find himself on arrival; they pointed out how extremely hard it would be for him not to appear either crestfallen or openly defiant the moment he set foot within the room. They all knew that Jacques would come, because Etienne had been moving around the room from group to group, boasting of his successful diplomacy, and adding that he had sent the Count a note that morning as a reminder of his promise.

Hence, what with questions here and an-

swers there, and praise and blame intermingled in every group, the young champion of agricultural interests was present to the company in the spirit long before he arrived in the flesh.

Such being the case, the appearance at the Harmmsters' official ball of M. de la Ferlandière and his sister was bound to be regarded as the event of the evening. The assembly was prepared to rivet its collective eye upon a first meeting, in peaceful social surroundings, of enemies who might one day meet again under dangerous and brutal conditions. So, when the footman in attendance at the reception-room door called aloud: "Mademoiselle and Monsieur de la Ferlandière," a dead silence ensued, so that Jacques, coming in with Jeanne on his arm, was surprised, in his strong, quiet way, at the impression he had produced.

It lasted for a few moments, during which people in the further corners of the room were nudging each other quietly and keenly watching the newcomers with mischievous expectancy. Inquisitiveness was all agog when Nathan Harmmster and stout Victor, in all the glory of tight evening clothes, came smilingly to the Squire, who, for the night, was officially their guest and friend. In point of fact, it certainly was an odd meeting. To one side of the little group stood Nathan, the man

of much business, flanked by Victor, the self-seeking old night-hawk, who had spent his life swooping from dinners to dinners and investments to investments, and, like some Chinese lacquered figure, wore ever and always the same sarcastic, inlaid smile. This grimace was singularly out of place at times, and became irresistibly comic when the careful man of money-bags was endeavoring to keep it in order, so as to appear interested in anything besides his precious self and his own affairs.

Opposite the two Jews stood Jacques and his sister, the Squire wearing his dress-coat with the rough grace of a cavalry colonel, while Jeanne, very simply gowned in straw-colored silk, had the gracious, reposeful manner of a gentlewoman quite secure of her position in an assembly of people who had "arrived" a little too quickly.

Alberta played her part in the scene to perfection. She was intensely clever, and one of her subtlest accomplishments lay in her power, at junctures such as these, of really appearing to be what she wished to seem. In all dramatic moments of her social life Alberta's boundless pride came to the rescue and supplied her with tact, distinction, and even with a sort of shyness, and what appeared true tender-heartedness. These qualities were so wholly unex-

pected in an imperious brunette like Alberta that all who were not in the secret were readily deceived. On this occasion, without apparent effort, she simply monopolized Jeanne, and then, in order the better to conceal her tactics, allowed Jacques to get separated from them and be mixed up for a while in the general crowd. By this means she knew that the attention focussed upon the Squire would gradually diminish. She decided not to tackle him till he had become, so far as others were concerned, just an ordinary guest like the rest of them.

However, she did not keep Jeanne very long to herself, because the Prefect, careful man, had just ascertained with some concern that the wind was once more blowing up for rain. Consequently, he had expressed a desire to take his leave, his health, he stated, being somewhat undermined by the routine of banquets incident to his office.

Now Alberta wanted nothing better than that, because the presence of the important personage was paralyzing her whole plan of campaign at every step. The chief charge her father had laid upon her had been to "take good care of the authorities," for the excellent reason that he fully intended to dodge every law safeguarding the conditions of factory labor as often as he possibly could, and also be-

cause he had a keen eye on the Government contracts that in the course of time would be so all-important to the firm.

"Whatever happens, see that the Prefect goes home in a good temper." That had been Nathan's standing order, repeated over and again both the day before and all that morning. The young Jewess had conscientiously acted up to it. The old functionary now taking his leave was obviously delighted with Alberta. During dinner his wily hostess had placed him on her right, talked politics to him with captivating cautiousness and an artless air of taking that diverting French subject seriously. Meanwhile she never failed to point out to him choice tidbits in the more exquisite of the dishes served—truffles, for example, in the timbale *à la financière.*

"Why, you are not making a good dinner, Monsieur le Préfet. Pray, allow me," she would say, helping him to a truffle, and picking the best one in the dish. Her father, surveying these manœuvers from afar, bestowed blinks of approval. In the course of the repast Alberta had even soared to heights of imagination, her best flight being the one wherein she displayed interest in the Prefect's children, and begged as a favor to be soon presented to the Prefect's wife.

Truth to tell, Alberta's part in the comedy was heavier than most of the rôles she had hitherto sustained, and she was in a downright hurry to have done with it. Consequently, it was with well-concealed delight that she heard the great man speak of going.

"So soon?" she pleaded. "Why, Monsieur le Préfet, it is only ten o'clock!"

"I know, Mademoiselle," he said, "but I live a good distance from here, and I am not so young as you. Only for that, you may be quite sure——"

"Oh, as for age, people are no older than they look!"

Whereat Monsieur le Préfet waxed amiable.

"What age do you take me for?" said he. "Make a guess, Mademoiselle, but without flattery, *please.*"

In her inmost heart Alberta was consigning the old functionary and his sixty-five summers to the uttermost deuce. Nevertheless, she looked at him in quite a girlish, eager way:

"Monsieur le Préfet," she said, "I put you down at forty-eight—not one year less!"

"Add seventeen to that!"

"You *don't* say so!"

"I do say so."

"It is impossible, Monsieur le Préfet. You *must* be drawing the long bow. You want to

please us, because you are afraid that we want to fight you. Tell me truly how young you are—do!—do!——"

Here Nathan and Victor arrived on the scene to continue this charming game. Alberta at once gave them her hand of cards to play out to a finish, and consigned the Prefect to their charge very quickly and pleasantly, with all the deference due to a man of his degree. Then she fluttered upstairs to her room like a bird, readjusted some pins and straightened a wrinkled fold or two, plied comb and curling tongs here and there for perhaps ten crowded seconds, and then, with a final dab of the powder-puff and a glance at the mirror, returned well armed to the seat of war and set out on the trail of Jacques.

She found him standing in the main reception-room with a group of big landlords from the Vale, chatting away without appearing to take the faintest interest in the soirée. This was a decided disappointment to Alberta. Jacques was unassailable by direct frontal attack where he was, unless she cared to expose herself to well-sustained volleys of feminine comment from her bosom friends. Wherefore she took a seat in a corner with two or three ladies, who were very deep in conversation about nothing in particular. While joining in

their gossip Alberta for the first time began to observe Jacques closely.

Was it the over-strain of the evening and its events? Or was it the sheer illusion of a preconceived idea? Whatever the cause, she felt positively agitated. Turning her eyes to a mirror where the young man's profile was reflected, she studied it minutely through the gossamer-like embroideries of her fan. No, most emphatically no! She had no disillusion to fear. The Squire's strong and handsome face stood out in bold relief from its conventional surroundings, and his deep, clear voice had the manly ring of true command. Besides, his fellow-guests were obviously listening to his opinions with deference. Yes, the little girl from the Abbaye had had good taste. Alberta could now thoroughly understand her intervention in the Creil refreshment-room. When people have friends like that they defend them against no matter whom. Let Uncle Victor look out for himself next time!

Hereupon a bevy of young people came up to Alberta, entreating her to open the ball. She prayed to be excused for a while, on the score of fatigue—which was really not much to be wondered at. She had had so many things to do all day.

"Then if we may, Mademoiselle," said one

of the young men, "we shall have a little music now and the dancing later?"

"Just as you wish, Messieurs," replied their hostess.

When they had left Alberta arose from her seat, with the excuse that she must keep an eye to her guests, and proceeded to describe certain highly scientific parallel movements. At the end of one of these she found herself—to all outward seeming by the merest chance—standing face to face with M. de la Ferlandière. The curtain at once rang up for the drama.

An all but pathetic smile flickered over the girl's lips.

"Monsieur de la Ferlandière," she began in low, pleading tones, "are you willing to make friends with us?"

"We are not personal enemies, surely," said Jacques, by way of courteous protest.

Alberta came forward a pace or two, to make good choice of her fighting-ground. The movement brought her immediately beneath a great cluster of electric globes, shedding a dazzling radiance on her robust and youthful charms. The present was perhaps the one chance of her lifetime, and she was determined to risk all for all. So she looked Jacques full in the eyes and began speaking with him as though there were

already some bond of sympathy between them, which dispensed with the formalities of ordinary etiquette and made them understand each other's slightest word, as though, indeed, Jacques lived his life in hers as she had been living hers in his. The proud are subject to these illusions.

"Do you dare to say, then, Monsieur de la Ferlandière," she continued, "that you do not hate me?"

"What should I hate you for?" exclaimed the Squire, decidedly startled.

"That is true," said Alberta, with drooping eyes. "Why *should* you hate me? I am not responsible for the factories."

"And even if you were, Mademoiselle?"

For the second time Alberta's eyes were raised, and lingered upon Jacques as though to plead for explanations.

"Most certainly, Mademoiselle," continued the astonished young man, "you have every right to be proud of the factories, as I have every right to be fond of the land. Indeed, it is for that very reason—to show you, I mean, that we can get on perfectly well together—that I am here at all this evening."

"Really?" said Alberta, her face enkindling as with unexpected bliss. "We can get on perfectly well together?"

"Such is my earnest desire," Jacques answered simply.

"Monsieur de la Ferlandière," said the girl, "I shall treasure those words of yours and recall them with happiness to-night and to-morrow, when I am far away from all this throng of people. I was so terribly afraid of having to live the rest of my days in a neighborhood where every one would loathe us and where we simply could not hope for sympathy. You assure me of the reverse of this. Pray allow me to tell you, in my father's name, how heartfelt is my gratitude."

Alberta looked really lovely as she spoke these words. It was the loveliness of the woman who would drive hatred far away from those near and dear to her, and who begs for a little love, and deems herself poor indeed if she must live without it.

"Do you know, Monsieur de la Ferlandière," continued Alberta, in a voice under perfect control, "when I first came to the Vale I dreamed such a lovely dream of how I would save the district from being rent into factions on our account. My dream will certainly come true, because I am now quite sure that you will not refuse us your aid in making peace."

"We all of us ask for nothing better than peace, Mademoiselle," said Jacques.

"No," she said softly, "not all. All in this neighborhood are not like you—they either will not or can not do good. And so I regard you as an ally—as my ally!"

"Certainly," answered Jacques, somewhat staggered by all these squarely placed blows.

"In that case," she went on, "I can answer for the success of everything. You are the Land and I am the Factory. Nothing in the district can be settled without us. However, we shall have another chat about these things. Do you dance?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"Then you must ask me for the first waltz."

And off she went to a group of guests impatiently awaiting her by the piano. But while walking thither she kept the point of her fan toward Jacques with a backward turn of the wrist that said *"au revoir"* more plainly than words.

The Squire was not given much spare time for solitary broodings over Alberta's talk. Some friends of his came along just then, and with them Jeanne. She left the others and halted in front of him with laughing eyes.

"Do you know, my little brother," she said, "you will have to fight at least five duels to-night, and as many more to-morrow!"

"Ah! And why?"

"Because Mademoiselle Harmmster has no eyes for anybody in the room but you!"

"We were talking shop."

"Did she convert you?"

"No, but the girl seems to me to have really good intentions!"

Whereat Jeanne flared up without warning.

"Good intentions, indeed!" said she. "To begin with, hell is paved with good intentions, my dear! And in the second place, you know —beware! That Jewess is quite diabolically pretty to-night."

"You need not be afraid."

"I'm not too sure of that," said Jeanne the tease.

Just then some few of the young folks around the piano called for silence. There were to be recitations before the ball began.

It is hard to stop a hen from laying her egg, and it is harder still to hinder members of the Parisian "intellectual" cliques from disburdening themselves of whatsoever in the way of thought may be inside them, especially when they find themselves in the presence of a seemingly select assembly, whose applause will be as frankincense of more than wonted potency and fragrance to the nostrils of their vanity. Wherefore some of the little poets present be-

gan to recite little poems of the day: weird, decadent verses, symptomatic of a still more decadent state of society, in which sensation takes the place of everything else. And such sensation! Either it is far-fetched and mangled, to make something evil and unfamiliar dart out of it, or else frankly incomprehensible to every hearer who has never been tapped on the head with a brick in the proper place.

The literary portion of the soirée began with an ode of the latter description, most pompously recited by a poor, pretentious little creature, whose strenuous mode of delivery disclosed the back of his gullet to the audience. The poem—let those who can understand it!—was entitled:

LE VIEUX ROI*

"Nuit
Vaine
Ombre pâlie
ailée de bleu . . .
J'ai froid! du feu! du feu! du feu!"
"Bravo, bravo, bravo, mon maître!"
L'esclave, a toi! chante ma peine.
Opium? Haschich? Tabac? Bétel?
Haschich, mon maître.
. . . Parcheminé, ceint de bûchers,
Un poisson d'or ailée de bleu,
Un corps couché d'imperator,
Les pieds aux poings, les mains au nez,
Vingt yeux vitreux—un regard mort."

*By M. Paul Fort. [Author's note.]

"Hi, hi, poète! poète!
O joie!—quel beau devoir de pittoresque!"
"C'est tout, mon maître."
"C'est peu, c'est fort . . .
Foin des brumes enfin! à bas leurs frustes fresques!
Quoi qu'on dit, la Couleur c'est bien joli tout de même!
Et c'est joli toujours et c'est joli quand même!
Et puis foin des rêveurs, distillateurs d'ennui.
Vraiment!
Leurs chants,
Ouït-on jamais de p'tites vieilles gueuses de folies telles?
A nous la Fresque à forte haleine, à nois les cris!"
"A toi, mon maître!
Ether? Opium? Haschich? Bétel?"
L'incendie a levé son panache en pleins cieux,
Sa flamme s'est gelée au creux froid du ciel sombre,
Et du Royaume on monte, on monte, on monte, on monte,
On s'écrase en pleurant vers mon bassin d'or bleu.
On m'écrase!—
Hé! c'est moi! Moi, le Roi!
"Merci à nous!"—"J'ai soif!"
"Merci à nous!"—"J'ai froid!"
"Tiens, bois et chauffe-toi. . . .
"Pourquoi forhuir du cor?
"Qui appelle mes dogues?
Je ne suis pas mort . . .
On marche sur mon corps . . .
Qui s'étend sur mon corps? . . ."
"Ta gorge, Roi, ta gorge!
Lampe ce glouglou d'or . . .

* * * * *

"Tonnerre! qui m'a fait boire un plein broc de fonte.
C'est trop! traître!—Ah! Damneur! . . .
L'enfer! la grande forge!
O mon . . . palais . . . éteint . . . orné . . . de neige . . .
et d'ombre!
. . . nuit!
"A nous la Fresque à forte haleine, à nous les cris!"*

*The following literal rendering of M. Fort's "Old King" is the best the Translator can do for the curious stuff the Author

When all was finished the audience gave vent to those faint cluckings of appreciation which you hear at times from Philistines at the close of intensely Wagnerian pianoforte imitations. Uncle Victor, however, had the courage of his opinions.

"It is mad," he whispered to Alberta. Her reply was a non-committal gesture, which seemed to convey that she did not care two straws, one way or the other.

As for Jeanne de la Ferlandière, who was notably pugnacious at times, she was being goaded to something like desperation by the

has pilloried above. It is a very poor best, but the Translator respectfully submits that it displays about as much beauty and wisdom to the square inch as the original:

"Night. A vain, wan shadow winged with blue. I am cold. Bring fire! fire! fire!" "Bravo, bravo, bravo, master mine!" "Ho slave! chant thou my woe! Opium? hashish? tobacco? betel-nut?"

"Hashish, my master."

—Shrivelled like a scroll, and girt about with funeral pyres, a gold fish winged with blue, an Imperator's body lying down, its feet in its fists and its hands to its nose, twenty glazed eyes—a dead man's stare."

"He-he! Poet, poet! O joy! What a beautiful task in the picturesque!"

"'Tis all, my master."

"'Tis little, 'tis strong! Fie upon fogs, after all! Down with their time-defaced frescoes! Whatever they say, Color is very pretty all the same! And 'tis pretty always, and 'tis pretty all the same! And then fie upon dreamers, distillers of boredom. Really! Their songs—heard man ever such fooleries from little old beggar-women?

—Strong-winded Fresco is ours, the shouts are for us!"

proceedings of a certain young man. He was leaning with one elbow on the piano, negligently waiting for his turn, and his very silence made Jeanne turn with anathemas to her brother:

"I wager anything," she said, "that his lordship over there is on the brink of reciting us something still more exasperating. Look at him, Jacques! Aren't his rolling eyeballs white enough? Isn't that wisp of hair a deadly sign of what's coming? And those flabby hands! My dear, it is a lucky thing that there are other sorts of hands left in the world—hands that can bind the yoke on the heads of the plow-

"Ho there, my master! Ether? opium? hashish? betel-nut?"

The conflagration hath reared its plume full in the skies, its flame hath frozen in the chill hollow of the gloomy sky, and from the Realm they mount, they mount, they mount, they mount. They are crushed as they weep towards my basin of blue gold."

"I am being crushed."

"Hey! 'tis I! I, the King!"

"Thanks to us!" "I am thirsty!"

"Thanks to us!" "I am cold!"

"Take, drink, and warm thyself."

"Wherefore the sound (?) of the horn? Who calleth my bull-dogs? I am not dead. They are walking over my body. Who is it that stretcheth himself upon my body?"

"Thy throat, King! Gulp down this golden gurgle!"

"Thunder! Who hath made me drink a jugful of molten iron? 'Tis too much, traitor. Ah, damning one! Hell! The big forge! O my—palace—extinguished—adorned—with snow—and shadow! . . .

. . . Night!"

"Strong-winded Fresco is ours, the shouts are for us!"

oxen. Beware—he is about to begin—he is beginning—he has begun!"

Still leaning with his arm on the corner of the piano, and with woebegone eyes upturned to the molded ceiling—but none the less facing Alberta, to whom he was manifestly "playing up"—the pale æsthete thus began:

"Maintenant, j'ai revu les moissons oubliées,
Et, dans la paix des soirs pleins de saines senteurs,
Les rudes moissonneurs, près des gerbes liées,
Croisant leurs bras avec des gestes de lutteurs.

"Maintenant, j'ai revu les forêts et les plaines,
Et j'ai marché dans les pâturages herbeux;
Ma gorge a respiré les puissantes haleines
Qui montent du sol roux blessé par les grands bœufs.*

"That is for *you,* my dear," said Jeanne very softly behind her fan. "It is a little love-letter. Alberta must have commissioned it from him. Really, that girl is all attention."

But the æsthete went on, in more melting tones than ever, as though his completely discouraged lips were letting fall the softest jujubes of lamentation:

*"I have now seen once more the harvests long forgotten, and in the peace of balmy eventide beheld the uncouth reapers standing by the bounden sheaves, folding their arms like wrestlers after strife.

"I have now seen once more the forests and the plains, and through lush pasture-lands have made my way; my breast hath breathed the strong scents of the earth, the red earth, torn up by the ploughing-teams."

"Mais, comme un empereur parmi les foules viles,
Je suis passé dans la campagne, indifférent;
Car toujours, en mon cœur, l'impur amour des villes
Chantait plus haut que la forêt et le torrent.

"Dans les routes des bois et dans les fraîches sentes,
Les augustes frissons des vieux arbres hautains
Ne me faisaient songer qu'à des robes absentes,
Et les ciels me faisaient regretter les satins! . . .

"Quand un vent balsamique arrivait des vallées,
J'avais des souvenirs pervers de parfums lourds;
Et les soleils épars dans les nuits constellées
N'étaient pour moi que des bijoux sur du velours."*

"There," observed Jeanne, "it is meant for *both* of you now."

"Both of us? I can tell you, Jeanne, that your fun hurts me."

"That man has missed fire, but you must give him his answer. Besides, look, they are all expecting it of you. *She* is coming to coax you, too. You are not going to keep her waiting, I suppose?"

Indeed, without definite suggestion from any one, but simply and solely because a slur

*"But like an emperor amid vile hordes, I went about the country side unmoved, for always in my heart the unclean love of towns sang louder than the forest and the stream.

"Along fresh woodland ways and forest tracks, the august quiverings of the proud old trees but made me think of skirts then far away, the welkin made me pine for satins lost to view.

"When a fragrant breeze came wafting from the vales, I mused perversely upon heavy scents, and the far-scattered suns of star-bespangled nights to me were only velvet-cushioned gems."

had been cast on the land, every eye in the room was now turned expectantly on Jacques.

"You can see for yourself," Jeanne whispered. "You are the land in human form and they are waiting for your answer."

Alberta's eyes were questioning M. de la Ferlandière, as though saying, "Why don't you get up?" And so Jacques, remaining where he was, asked the last reciter for the name of his author.

"Ephraïm Mickaël," replied the æsthete, in sing-song tones. "He went out very young—he was quenched at the dawn of his life, like a pale church taper!"

"Would you allow me to recite something, too?" asked Jacques.

"Oh, my dear sir, what need to ask?"

And chairs were moved and drawn up around the Squire as he took the place the "intellectual" had now vacated.

"I shall give you," he said, "some verses by Paul Harel, a poet who not only did not die very young, but is likely, as things are, to die very old. I must also confess that between him and a pale church taper there is quite a difference."

With this light touch of irony, most courteously let fall in order to warn the audience

that he was striking a different keynote, Jacques began in his ringing tones:

"L'air ne retentit plus des chansons de la plèbe.
Les modernes ruraux, fils de ceux qui luttaient,
Ont refusé l'effort et déserté la glèbe.
Où sont les paysans, les vrais, ceux qui chantaient. . . .?

"Aux anciens, il fallait la plaine et la charrue,
Le grand air dont le souffle ondoie au front des blés
Les nouveaux ont quitté le sillon pour la rue;
Et, jeunes, des désirs malsains les ont troublés.

"Les pères étaient beaux, tout brunis par le hâle;
Leurs artères battaient, pleines d'un sang vermeil;
Les fils étiolés ont le visage pâle;
L'ombre a pris ces enfants, nés pour le grand soleil.

"Leurs bras n'étaient pas faits pour les besognes viles
Et le joug paternel pesait à leur fierté.
Les voyez-vous, épars sur le chemin des villes,
Tous ces riches d'espoir qu'attend la pauvreté!

"Ils ont, ces émigrants, ambitieux ou lâches,
Gêné les citadins, gêné les artisans.
Dieu les avait créés pour de plus nobles tâches,
Les paysans devaient rester des paysans! . . .

"Pauvres gens! au démon qui vous soufflait l'envie,
A l'esprit tentateur il fallait dire: 'Non!'
L'homme n'a pas le droit de gaspiller sa vie,
D'abdiquer sa grandeur, de renier son nom!

"Les cités vous ont pris dans tous leurs esclavages.
L'amère ambition vous a gâté le cœur.
Civilisés! Pourquoi . . ? Quand vous étiez sauvages,
Le sol dur craquait-il sous votre pied vainqueur?

"Dans la terre, où le soc a fait ses déchirures,
Le bon grain du semeur n'a-t-il donc plus germé?
Dans la plaine, où les blés étalaient leurs parures,
Les soleils dévorants ont-ils tout consumé?

"Rien n est changé, pourtant! La-bas, le trèfle rouge
Brille entre l'orge épaisse et le sainfoin tremblant:
Le trèfle, où le soleil éclatant luit et bouge,
Tache la plaine en feu de son carré sanglant.

"La campagne toujours a des gloires superbes,
Mais quels féconds labeurs, mais quels joyeux hymens
St tous les bras oisifs allaient s'offrir aux gerbes,
Si le flot des absents remontait nos chemins!

"Ah! que le déserteur s'arrête et qu'il revienne
Vers la ferme, à l'endroit où ses pères sont morts!
Du métier désappris, que l'absent se souvienne!
C'est le travail des champs qui nous rendra les forts."*

The applause was general, but very mixed in quality. Among the groups, some were openly enthusiastic, while others were cautious and reserved. In this artificial environment

*"The air no more resounds with songs of simple folk, the rustics of these days, the sons of those who strove, have given up the fight, and left the land deserted. Where are true peasants now, the lads that used to sing?

"Their elders ever craved for plain and plow, and for God's air whose breath goes rippling o'er the corn; but these, the last, have left the furrows for the streets, and in their youth been vexed with sick desire.

"Their fathers were fine men, well-browned and sunburnt, their throbbing arteries were charged with rich, red blood; their pale-faced sons are blanching in the dark; darkness hath trapped these children, born to enjoy the sun.

"Their arms (they said) were not made for coarse labor, their father's yoke weighed heavy on their pride—Say, do you see them, scattered along the townward highway, these rich in hope, whom poverty awaits?

"These emigrants, some idle, some ambitious, have vexed the citizens, disturbed the craftsmen too. God had created them for nobler labors; our peasant-folk should peasant-folk remain.

"Poor people, when the demon breathed envy in your ears,

"'Poor Odile,'" thought Jeanne. "'It is well she is not here.'"—*Page* 212

the breezy, healthy stanzas had gone over the feminine powdered shoulders and elderly male bald heads like the soughing of the wind in the oaks, with the result that opinions were as sharply divided as when a window is suddenly opened for fresh air.

Alberta was the first to thank Jacques. Jeanne pressed his hand when he resumed his seat. "I am a good *second,*" she said. "All the same, I mean my thanks." Meanwhile, in the cosiest corner, stout Victor stood with both hands in his pockets and his back to the fire,

you should have said the tempting spirit nay; man hath no right to squander his existence, abjure his greatness, and renounce his name.

"The cities now have trapped you in all their forms of serfdom, bitter ambition hath depraved your hearts. Ye are civilized! What's gained? While yet ye were barbarians, did not the hard earth yield beneath your conquering feet?

"Out on the land, in the clefts torn by the plowshare, does the sower's goodly grain spring up no more? Down in the plain, where the cornfields spread their glories, have all things perished under burning suns?

"No, naught has changed. Down yonder the red clover gleams nigh the quivering sainfoin and thick barley, and, where the dazzling sunshine wins its way, speckles the fiery plain with a foursquare blood-red stain.

"The country always hath its splendid glories, but if the tide of lost ones ebbed back along our roads, if every idle pair of arms were offered for the harvests, how many a blithe bridal would there be, and merry christening.

"May each deserter halt and wend his way towards the farm, and where his parents died. May truants call to mind the trade they have unlearned! 'Tis country labor that will make us strong!"

cawing away, "Bravo, bravo!" like the cynical old night-bird that he was.

"The dancing had better begin now, I think," put in Nathan Harmmster.

In a few moments the ball had begun, and Jeanne took the opportunity to say serious words to Jacques.

"You know," she said, "we have now been on view quite long enough, and we had better go. This crowd of folks from the boulevards is getting on my nerves."

"I am quite willing, but I have promised Mademoiselle Harmmster the first waltz."

"Really?" Jeanne gasped. And she started back aghast.

"What is the matter with you?" asked her brother, somewhat nettled.

"Nothing."

"I could not do otherwise."

"Oh, I know. We can't always do the things we want to do. I have proof of that."

The Squire's eyes became points of interrogation.

"My proof," pursued Jeanne, "is that I want to go home this minute, only I can't. The floor of this house is burning my feet!"

"Let us go home, then."

"No. Go and dance."

"And how about you?"

"Oh! Who am I?"

And Jeanne sat down again. Presently she closed her fan with a snap.

"Look out!" she exclaimed. "Here is your Jewess coming to hunt you up again!"

"*My* Jewess?" protested Jacques.

"Yes, *your* Jewess, and for your *first* waltz! You are treating her like a queen."

Alberta was in fact coming toward them, bearing herself with proud erectness in her dark emerald silks, and manifestly bent on reminding the Squire of the promise made just now, should he have forgotten it already.

"You will remember, Monsieur de la Ferlandière," she said, "that the *first* waltz is ours."

For one instant Jacques trembled on the brink of open rudeness and of a definite rupture with Alberta at the very outset of peace negotiations for the good of the district. But from her seat behind him Jeanne muttered ironic encouragements in the dreadful tone that women know so well where to find on these occasions.

"Off with you, Jacques—you are keeping her waiting. It is really too bad of you—go on—look sharp!"

Wild with himself, his sister, the soirée, and every one at it, Jacques made his bow to Al-

berta, proffered his arm, and led her away for the dance.

Jeanne remained seated where she was, and refused every invitation on the perpetual score of fatigue. She followed her brother and his partner with almost a melancholy gaze as they whirled to and fro before her in the intricate mazes of the dance. What a handsome pair they made! Stern-faced and tall, her brother was dancing quite faultlessly, but with coldness and reserve. Alberta, on the other hand, was giving herself up to full enjoyment of her wholly unexpected opportunity. It was pretty plain that she felt happy with the Squire's arm about her, and that he might become her lord and master to-morrow if he cared. Alberta, indeed, was triumphing in the ready-made surroundings that suited her so well, all "blazing with light and breathing with perfume," amid the flow of the music and the wild intoxication of the dance, while Jeanne was thinking to herself, "Poor Odile! It is well that she is not here!"

The waltz over, Jacques rejoined his sister and offered to take her home at once.

"Provided it does not cost you too dearly," observed Jeanne.

Jacques made her no reply.

However, they had hardly left the ball-room

ere Alberta quitted it, too, and passing into an adjacent apartment, pressed her burning brows against the cold window-pane to watch the Squire's coupé, drawn by two magnificent horses, wheeling slowly into position near the steps leading down from the hall door.

She caught a last glimpse of him, in the fur-lined overcoat he wore over his dress clothes, as he stood aside to give his sister time to get in and settle down. Then the carriage drove off, and the girl at the window stood a long time peering through the darkness after it.

When all was over, and not even the sound of the wheels could be heard from afar, Alberta raised her head and looked aloft. A countless host of stars were softly beaming in the silent blue of heaven. The girl smiled at them for the first time in her life.

"Who knows?" she said musingly, as she dropped the heavy curtain. "Yes—who knows? I may have my own little star up there!"

Light as a bird, she rejoined the general company, but sat apart from the rest in a reverie. Her father found her too negligent of her duties as hostess and came to her side accordingly.

"Aren't you dancing?" he said.

"I shall not dance any more," she replied.

"Are you ill?"

"No, on the contrary, I am happy—oh, so happy!"

CHAPTER XII

By two o'clock the following afternoon Odile had heard five several and distinct accounts of the happenings at the Harmmsters.

What formidable reports they were, to be sure! Odile had begun by taking a humorous view of them, but when her callers had laboriously laid in their pictures line upon line, with quite a surprising amount of the decorative detail that some women so recklessly invent when they would cause a sister-woman pain, she ended by becoming a prey, most sorely against her will, to certain uneasy misgivings. She dismissed these from her mind as soon as possible, and even felt angry with herself on their account. To her surprise, however, they returned and grew more and more persistent, being singularly favored in this respect by the turn conversation invariably took, and the ceaseless allusions to Jacques and Alberta. Finally—and this was a more serious symptom—Odile became obedient to a ruling impulse of her nature and chose to regard the whole affair as a purely personal matter,

affecting herself alone. Wherefore she asked no more questions, and did her best to chill the ardent zeal of various kind bosom friends by an outward show of complete indifference.

It was the Monday of the month reserved by Odile and her aunt for receiving callers. Jacques and his sister were rather late in reaching the Abbaye, where they found almost a houseful of visitors assembled. Tea was served, and although Odile was on thorns to divert the flow of pleasantries that had become so acutely painful, she was made to swallow her bitter draught once more, this time at the hands of one Mademoiselle Desbougit, an elderly, pious female of the rigidly righteous type, who made it her business to charge her neighbors extortionately for what little she gave, or deemed she gave, to the service of God and the Church.

Jacques appeared ill at ease and almost out of sorts. Jeanne was still less in her wonted high spirits, and for probably the first time in the lives of all three there was a sense of constraint between them. All their misdirected efforts to exorcise it proved unavailing. It had sprung up from misunderstandings quite petty in themselves, and these were naturally bound to grow bigger and darker in the sequel, when

silently tabooed as conversational topics by the three most intimately concerned.

When all the callers had gone, Odile, so self-possessed and tranquil hitherto, heaved a sigh of deep relief and flung herself down on a couch in the nearest corner of the room. She let her hands fall limply in her lap, and then, while the full pain of her agonized misgivings showed clearly in her weary eyes, began asking herself for the hundredth time if the terrible thing could be true.

Could it be true, as they had all been plainly suggesting, that Alberta's opulent charms had proved too much for Jacques? Was it true that Jacques and she had stood apart from the rest for ever so long and billed and cooed like a pair of lovers? Did Alberta really make the Squire so marked a man by her manner of asking him to recite, and to recite something rebutting the cherished ideas of her father's personal friends? Why was she so manifestly delighted to waltz with him first, and why did she dance with no other partner afterward? Finally, what was the cause of her all but total disappearance from the ball-room when Jacques had taken his leave?

And then again there were other questions. Why should Jacques, the manly man, whose simplest actions had a meaning in them, have

allowed himself to be thus outmanœuvered at a purely official gathering? Did poor Odile, then, count for so little in his life? Was she only the orphan ward whose business affairs he faithfully transacted? And had it never come into his head, for all his sensitiveness on the point of honor, that he might be wounding his little friend? Was she once more to be made to feel quite friendless in the world? There could be but scanty room for kind thoughts of her in a heart where a rival reigned.

A rival? That was an extremely ugly word. It had never come into her mind before. Still, after all, was not Jacques entitled to act as he chose? He was doubtless her friend and guardian; yet had he ever so much as thought of coming more closely into her life—into a life so pathetically lonely as hers?

So that even in the first flush of unspeakably pained surprise she thought no ill of Jacques himself. Indeed, she decided from the outset that she would not, must not, judge him. He must always be regarded as a friend, with the frankest and kindest sympathy and gratitude. Unhappily, it is so very easy to grow accustomed to one's hopes—even easier than to become familiar with good fortune when it has arrived. Odile's hopes had been growing for a very long while in the kindly peace of the

countryside, amid simple lives and friendships far away from the outer world. In so quiet a provincial neighborhood, too, Jacques hardly ever met any other girl-friends, and hence it was perhaps inevitable that she should have been all in all to him—till now.

For she really had been that to him—at least at times, and for the flying moments that are perhaps only "things apart" in the life of a man, while they constitute "woman's whole existence." She could recall the thousand little things that, when put together, delineate so infallibly the nature of a friendship between man and maid. Yes, Jacques must undoubtedly have loved her—when she was the only girl he knew in the Vale. He, the strong man of her ideals, had certainly loved her, and regarded her as his future helpmate in life, all weak as she was. No; a clear-seeing woman's eyes are not so readily deceived. He had loved her, or, rather, perhaps, he had thought that he loved her.

Now, however, the wilderness was becoming peopled, and Jacques had been enabled to draw comparisons. A time of strife was at hand.

At thought of this Odile heaved a sigh of mingled helplessness and resignation. What was the use of strife—of a feminine duel for the mastery? The only sort of love she deemed

worthy of the name could be freely accepted, but by no means be enforced, like an incompleter and lower love. Also its non-requital must be met with the proud silence due to self-respect. Indeed, it was something of a comfort to her now that she had behaved herself so quietly and good-humoredly that afternoon, without putting any awkward questions or showing a gloomy face to even the most tiresome of her callers, and certainly without offering for their delectation the sheer anguish that rent her heart.

Again it must be noted that in Odile's heart of hearts she had been almost expecting this blow. The dream, she thought, had been far too beautiful to last. Perhaps, too, it had been too spacious and splendid a dream, because she felt that she was a very weak little body after all to carry upon her frail shoulders responsibility for the happiness of a man like Jacques, with lofty ideals of womanhood, which perhaps she could never realize.

With these sad thoughts, mistrust of the future and unreasoned dread of the present surged up in her mind once more. From her seat in the corner she looked wearily out of the window at Aunt Bertha, who was dawdling on the porch with the last of the departing callers for what seemed a little eternity. Behind their

figures, and in the middle distance, along the road to La Ferlandière, Odile saw as in a vision the last poor fragments of her dream floating away into space and vanishing in the twilight.

Just then her spaniel, Djinn—a present from Jacques—pushed open the drawing-room door and came in and laid his nose on his mistress's lap, looking up with the troubled, gentle gaze that animals so often display when we are in pain, as though they would fain know what to do to relieve us.

Odile softly stroked the silken ears, and then, while Djinn's big eyes prolonged their scrutiny, she could not help crying a little as she caressed the poor doggie's wise-seeming brows.

"Yes, Djinn," she said ruefully, "you are right. I love him! I *do* love him."

The sound of returning footsteps then warned her that it was high time to withdraw to her room if she would avoid the large consignments of the smallest possible talk with which excellent Aunt Bertha was now laden.

* * * * *

The following afternoon Odile took Djinn for an exercise walk along the high road as far as La Ferlandière. This appeared to her the simplest way of showing that she was in no

way offended and was not disposed to sulk at the turn events had taken.

The night's sleep had done her good. Moreover, the great Consoler, whose providence never denies its pearl of dew to the tiniest blade of grass, had poured into her soul a quite unexpected peace, together with the wise resolution to await events and avoid worrying about things which, after all, had extremely flimsy foundations, at any rate so far.

A fair measure of effort, however, was needed to uphold and maintain this tranquil state of mind, because the visit at La Ferlandière proved short and extremely unsatisfactory. Jacques had been kind—had been kindness itself, in fact, as he always was; but his manner had been strangely subdued and even dejected. As for Jeanne, she manifestly had something on her mind. Her relations with her brother seemed to have undergone a total change in two short days, and her candid face was unable to conceal the whole world of misery within. When Odile was going, she had kissed her with unusual tenderness, as though to indicate that things had gone wrong, and that sad days were in store.

Contrary to her usual custom, however, Odile did not allow this second confirmation of her fears to take possession of her mind.

Returning by way of the outlying fish-pools belonging to the Abbaye estate, she argued the matter out for herself and endeavored to feel persuaded that Jeanne's attitude in the matter was rather childish and ridiculous. Why should Jeanne attribute such significance to her brother's mere courtesy, however marked and notable, when displayed in general society to a young girl like Alberta, whom circumstances had placed in an extremely awkward position? Jacques was a gentleman in every fiber of his being, and simply had no choice but to act as he did.

After reaching this sensible conclusion, Odile did her very best to think of something else.

Unluckily, it was a singularly dreary winter's day, with a dull haze overhead, through which a pallid, uncertain light came filtering down on the cold, dead world below. As Odile walked along the deserted woodland ways the gauntness of the naked forest aisles and the leaden hue of the erstwhile silvery brooks could not fail to help to dispirit her. She felt, somehow, as though the universe were expiring in a neglected old age. The nests that could be seen tossing here and there amid branches now no longer withholding any secrets seemed deserted forever and a day, while the skies appeared to be enfolding the horizon in a dismal

shroud, as though they wanted to bury the world out of hand, and so, at last, have done with it.

Odile was most unwilling to lose her peace of mind, and therefore resisted these doleful climatic suggestions sturdily. In the coming spring, she reflected, the whole scene around her would rise from the dead and exult in resplendent life and beauty. The buds would burst open on every bough; the primroses would flower again and the blossoming hawthorns cast fragrant shadows on every purling brook; the birds would come speeding back to rebuild each ruinous nest; and the sky would be blue once more and beam cheerfully, like the light of hope, upon earthly sorrows and fears.

Thus pluckily did she reason with herself as she made her way along the narrow field path called locally the "Tuquet"—a cross-country track found convenient as a short-cut between the main roads leading to the Vale and La Ferlandière. In the course of her walk, moreover, she found Djinn's pranks and capers of material service in banishing dismal ideas. He kept frisking to and fro, and occasionally scampered at quite notable speed over the tiny green blades of the now sprouting corn. Odile threw him stones to retrieve—which he did

right gleefully, with roguish eyes and much triumphant wagging of his tail.

Suddenly she stopped. A carriage had come into view between the poplars bordering the upper main road to the Vale, which wound along the summit of the ridge to which the field-path clambered. She recognized the vehicle at once. It was the Harmmsters' coupé and was drawn by the two big circus steeds.

Standing midway on the slope where she did, Odile commanded a view of both the upper and the lower roads. She could distinctly make out Alberta's figure in the coupé, for the carriage windows were not raised, although the day was cold. The carriage went by the Abbaye at a quick pace, and then, wheeling sharply at the corner, turned up the road to La Ferlandière.

Keeping Djinn close beside her, and checking his very natural propensity to bark, Odile followed the movements of the carriage till it reached the white boundary post at the top of the drive leading down to the château. Then all at once her heart gave a painful throb and seemed for a moment to stop beating entirely. She could distinctly see Alberta giving certain orders to the coachman, after which the man drove slowly—ever so slowly—around the precincts of the château and home-farm, as though

his mistress were spying out the land and taking the bearings of positions to be captured hereafter. The militant young Jewess, indeed, even got down for a while and stood peering across the pond, through the screening belt of trees, at the château opposite, as though fixing in her memory the minutest details of the scene. The whole manœuver lasted perhaps a quarter of an hour, and then, instead of continuing her drive to Tergnier, Alberta bade the coachman turn around and drive home, with a singular and somewhat brazen indifference to the opinions of observers—and there are always many such observers in very quiet districts, where the smallest happenings are by way of being considered events.

Returning by the way she had come, Alberta passed Odile for the third time, and presently —on the higher road we have mentioned—for the fourth. The distance was not considerable, yet on no occasion did she catch sight of Odile. Eventually the carriage disappeared at a gallop in the direction of Frilleux and the Vale.

All Odile as yet realized was the fact that she was shivering in spite of her furs. Without further reflection, therefore, or even so much as an effort to focus things in their proper light, she made her way to the road and hast-

ened back to the Abbaye, feeling jaded and chilled in every limb.

The resounding, empty halls of the great mansion seemed as cheerless to her as her own poor empty heart. It was all true, then, alas! There was *some* understanding between Jacques and Alberta—some bond, some mysterious link or other. Yet Jacques had told her nothing about it! All her forewarnings had come from strangers. Why was he thus silent if there was nothing to conceal? For the rest of that doleful day Odile shut herself up in her room and was alone with her very great sorrow.

At set of sun even nature herself seemed disposed to share the girl's mood. There was a pattering of hail, and then down came the snow in large flakes. It was a heavy and continuous fall, and in less than twelve hours all communication with adjoining villages had been more or less interrupted.

It continued to snow thus for two days. Odile, who had caught cold, was naturally confined to the house, and thus had even more than the ample leisure of country life in winter months to brood by the fireside over every real and imaginary detail of her grief. How swiftly her artless dream had vanished! It had been so lovely a dream—if empty dreams can ever,

in sooth, be said to be lovely at all. It was now lost to her life, its radiance quenched forevermore. She ruefully found a likeness for it in the bright blaze of the logs in the hearth before her. Soon they would be smoldering and nothing would be left but a gray heap of dead ashes between the fire-dogs.

She arose from her seat and took a few turns up and down the room. Standing at the high bay-window, whence a view of the whole valley could be secured, she watched the dismal snow falling ever faster and faster. The woods and fields, the roads and lanes, were now swathed in a spotless winding-sheet. The whole country was lapped in the strange stillness of the snow-wreaths, with their eerie suggestions of the cold, calm silence of the tomb.

A row of trees showed where La Ferlandière lay, some two or three miles distant, asleep, so it seemed, like some white mausoleum by the winding Jouine. Despite her grief—or perhaps by reason of it—Odile began to wonder what Jacques might be doing at that moment, and soon interminable dialogues began in her weary yet restless brain. An inner voice kept whispering, "He is thinking of Alberta. Do not think any more about him. Look! Is not nature herself now showing you how completely you are parted from him?"

As if in confirmation of the self-torturing voices within, the snow kept coming down more heavily and thickly than ever. The driving flakes were sifting up on the window-sashes, while the whole face of the land lay blotted out from view by dazzling, shimmering curtains, tossed furiously in the squalls that had sprung up, and looking more than ever like the flapping cerements of a world laid out for burial. Ever and anon the scared figure of some luckless little bird could be descried, silhouetted sharply against the whiteness. A few shrill notes of fright would be heard, and then die upon the ear, engulfed in the roar of the tempest.

* * * * *

For the whole of that night also, and throughout the forenoon following, it continued to snow unceasingly. Toward one o'clock in the afternoon a rift appeared in the clouds and the sky cleared slowly, allowing the cold radiance of a blood-red sun to play through the trees in the Bois Roux and over the sparkling napery of the world beneath. Odile had felt stifled in more senses than one ere respite came that afternoon, and nothing would please her but to go out and take a walk as best she might. The neighboring peasants had already been out with carts and shovels and

cleared a footway to the village. She decided to go for a ramble as far as this pathway led, and was soon adventuring along it, well wrapped in her furs, and with her broad collar tucked up about her ears.

She certainly experienced relief at first in contemplating the manifold new aspects Mother Earth is wont to assume when she has first donned her white winter's mantle. But whether as a result of a melancholy feeling engendered by the absolute stillness and sameness around her or by the keenly painful remembrance of the scene two days before, Odile felt drawn into the little village church as she passed by, in order to seek relief within its shelter from the heavy burden of her sorrow.

Such visits to the Blessed Sacrament were by no means rarities in Odile's weekday life. At the close of all especially trying days she sought and found solace on her knees in the plain wooden pew where her family for generations had knelt and worshiped God. She loved the old seat and its familiar, dear surroundings—the blue altar of the Blessed Virgin, with a frontal adorned by her dead mother's hands, and the stained-glass windows of the chantry, the elaborate designs for which were the fruit of long years of loving labor at the Abbaye in her childhood. At Mass-

time, too, the position of her seat commanded a near and clear view of the Sisters from the orphanage, with their meek little charges. She had known and loved a good many of these orphan children. Several of her little friends had ere this been summoned Home for eternal holiday and were now with their Heavenly Father.

It was perhaps during the period immediately preceding her Italian journey that Odile had formed the regular habit of stealing into the church alone when oppressed by the weight of recollections and regrets. When she had genuflected and reached her place, she would bow down her head in her hands and give free vent to her anxiety about the future, dissatisfaction with the present, and wistful remembrance of the past. During these twilight visits there were, as a rule, no other worshipers present, and on such occasions Odile did not deny herself the mournful solace of tears. However, she almost always ended up by reproving herself for thus giving way. She reflected that melancholy moods were unwholesome moods, and wondered why she could not become a common-sense, practical individual, like so many of the girls she knew. She was aware that she had reached her present stage of disillusionment by the road of solitude and

self-scrutiny. For her comfort's sake, indeed, she was far too given to dissection and analysis. She even found herself wondering at times if Rousseau was very far wrong when he wrote: "The human being who *thinks* is a degraded animal."

But she would dismiss this fancy from her mind abruptly and then take up an opposite line of thought altogether to sustain her faith in human nature. In such perpetual strife of debate between ideals and aspirations on the one hand and the hard facts of life on the other, Odile seemed to be left without power of will to decide on a clear conclusion. She felt overwhelmed by the struggle, and there were moments when she was even tempted to wonder if she were right in thus seeking sanctuary from the unspeakable realities of life, and whether it would not be better, as Byron advises, to remain chained to the stake in the outer world and stoically await an hour of deliverance when the body shall have served its turn and the soul can wing its way to the blue—if we have a soul!

For that was one of the most disquieting sides of Odile's mental make-up. There were days when her faith was as strong as the Squire's robust belief. The eternal truths were then so completely and readily manifest to her mind that she felt sorry indeed for all around

her who did not put them into practice. During such periods it seemed to her as though she no longer merely *believed,* but rather *felt* God's sensible presence, beholding Him as He is, and "face to face."

And then there were other days when all was changed. God seemed to be repeating to her the words Our Lord spoke to St. Mary Magdalene: "Do not touch Me." The sense of His presence faded from her entirely. All was then darkest night within her soul. She would be tormented by temptations against faith which assailed not only the fuller developments of Catholic truth with which the sectaries of "Reform" find fault, but the very fundamentals of all revealed religion—the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, the very distinction of good and evil. Mocking voices seemed to clamor in her ears that these eternal verities were the merest of claptrap formulas, invented by priests to mystify foolish women and terrorize weak-minded men.

While the paradoxes of modern skepticism thus besieged her brain, the antiquated and rancorous objections to Catholic faith which she had hitherto been able to brush aside without much effort would spring to life again and demand that she render them full account of the hope that was in her. At such crises Odile

would rise from her hassock and kneel down at the altar-rails, to be nearer Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. There she would renew her act of faith and repeat from Holy Gospel the sublime and heartfelt words of seeming contradiction: "I believe, O Lord, help Thou my unbelief." Then she would wait a few moments, bowing down her head on the stone balustrade like a drooping flower all parched by the wind and sun, that awaits the saving rain.

Such solemn moments were nearly always rewarded with consolation. She would become conscious of infinitely tender and gentle influences descending upon her soul. It was as though Our Lord left the ciborium and placed His sacred hand upon her burning brows, with the words, "My daughter, go in peace."

This particular afternoon Odile was full of the peace that this world can not give when she left the altar-rails. She raised her eyes, and lo! the clear glory of the early sunset was irradiating the storied windows. "Thou wilt remember me, O my God!" she murmured gratefully. "Thou wilt remember *him,* too, and Thou wilt remember that I sought Thee out at this sad hour, as my ever-faithful Friend, and that I obeyed Thy command: 'Come unto Me, all ye

that labor and are heavily burdened.' Thou wilt remember, wilt Thou not, the wilderness of my heart and the emptiness of my life, and all its withered hopes?"

She came out of the porch almost fully determined upon her future course of life—one of much patient endurance and resignation. Like those loamy soils where a violent storm can tear a crop out by the roots, Odile's soul was ever ready to be plowed and harrowed by grief, and then sown over by God with new seed for another and a different harvest.

She was about to enter the narrow lane leading to the Abbaye when all at once she found herself face to face with Jacques. He was standing awaiting her at the turning, with his hand on the bridle of a horse that had evidently been ridden hard and well-nigh breast deep through the snow.

How mysterious is the power of sorrow! Odile, who had been wafted upward on its wings, now experienced very mingled feelings at sight of Jacques. There was happiness at her heart, no doubt, but there was also a shade of weariness. What was the use of beginning all over again? Why try to give life to what was bound to die? Why make any further struggles? Surcease of strife and the cold peace of an empty heart in a vain and hollow

world had grown almost desirable to her. She was disposed to pray to be delivered, not, indeed, from "the land of the living," but, as a Frenchman has oddly expressed it, "from the land of the loving"—*"De la terre où l'on aime, deliverez-moi, Seigneur!"*

Jacques felt how things stood as he hesitantly approached.

"Odile," he said, "I have come from the Abbaye. You were out when I got there, and your aunt did not know which road you had taken. So I came straight to the church, because I knew I would find you here."

"Why?"

"Because you are in pain."

When he had said this Odile stiffened slightly. She would not thus readily allow her inmost heart to be laid bare by any one who no longer owned the key of that sanctuary. Jacques continued:

"Oh, I am not jealous of God in the least, although I could have wished He were not your *only* confidant. Because, after all, I am a friend, Odile."

"I am sure you are, Jacques."

"Are you as sure as you used to be?"

There was no reply.

"Look me well in the face, Odile," said the Squire.

She raised her eyes to his, and he saw that she had been weeping.

"Yes, Jacques," she said bravely, "I am as sure of your friendship as I always was."

"But are you as sure of it in the same way?"

She did not answer this.

"Odile," went on Jacques, "we must get back to the Abbaye, both of us. I am afraid you will catch cold here, and besides, I want to have a talk with you and with your aunt as well."

So saying, the Squire pushed his horse into the Abbé Hans's barn and then turned and walked with Odile down the narrow lane.

Not a soul was in sight between the hedgerows, which had now become ramparts of snow, all sparkling in the chill beams of the setting sun. Before and around them the valley lay asleep in its far-spread, stainless mantle.

Odile was shod too lightly for such a day, and her feet kept slipping from under her. Jacques took her unresisting arm in his and upheld her gently from further stumbles, as though she were a child.

"Lean on me," he said, "in the *same* way that you used to."

"Thank you, Jacques," was all her reply.

"Odile, why did you not answer my question just now?"

She was silent.

"Why was it?" he repeated.

Still she was silent.

"I want to know," he persisted.

She spoke no word, but dropped her blushing face in the furs about her throat as though to conceal the tell-tale expression of her eyes. They were now midway in the lane, and Jacques stopped dead.

"Odile," he cried, "I have been more of a dead man than a living one this whole past week!"

Sooth to say, he looked despondent indeed as he wearily folded his arms.

"Is there no way," he went on, "is there no earthly way of showing you my real self—of proving to you the utter absurdity of anything you may have heard?"

"And of anything I may have *seen?*" she queried, lifting up her head.

But when she beheld his deathly pallor and the wild look of pain in his eyes she knew that his face reflected the loyal soul within. In a flash, and without need of the spoken word, the whole truth was made manifest, as though soul had spoken to soul. Misunderstanding was at an end, and Odile put out a little gloved hand in affectionate token of reconciliation. Jacques took both her

hands in his and made reply with infinite tenderness:

"Odile," he said, "I do not know the ways of what the books call love. I am not what is termed an up-to-date man—a man who can talk a great deal about things—I am as shy as a boy in your company. I have never dared—I do not even dare now—and yet for all that I feel forced to speak, so that you may never, never doubt me in time to come, and that I may never again endure such an awful week as the last. It is this way, Odile. If you were not living here in the valley, so close to me, the whole life and light of my world would be gone. The land that I love would be like a dead bride or a scentless flower to me. I would have nothing more to ask of Nature but her silence and her solitude—the better to think of you—yes, of you—always, always of you. You are all the world to me, Odile. You are the reason why I live—in the human sense. I know you, and I know everything about you—the flowers you love—the days you go to church—and since everything speaks to me of you, yes, every forest-path and every poor man's cottage, you are the first in my thoughts—the first, too, in my prayers. Ah, Odile, what a dreadful week I have spent!"

"Forget it!"

"Ay, let us forget it!" echoed Jacques. "It is the best, the only thing to do. Let us think no more about the world of society and fashion, and let that world think no more about us. To stay here together, dearest, far away from the crowd, among our own familiar folk, and with this kindly countryside around us, where everything speaks to us of each other—what a beautiful dream, Odile!"

Thus they fared onward in the rose-red of the sunset, and the girl nestled closer to her lover's side as she listened to his words. The whole white-robed valley seemed intent upon their wooing, and to watch and to listen very happily and demurely. There were sparkling festoons of hoar-frost on every branch around them, linking tree with tree, and bejewelling the poplars with myriads of tiny gems from their lowest bows to the tips of their lofty summits. The sun now sinking in the west beyond La Ferlandière appeared to dally in his course an instant to bestow a last caress on the little bride-elect—as though he would wreathe her in a rarer, lovelier halo than gleamed on the faëry realms around her.

Presently Odile stood still and silent at a turn in the lane, where there was a magnificent view of the whole country thereabout. It was as

though she were made to feel aware, in the light of an overmastering emotion, that the beauty of the scene was somehow meant for her, as a kind of blessing upon her from a beneficent and kindly creation. She tasted the secret joy that comes when the soul is steeped in the gentle yet masterful message of all innocent created things. Her heart went out to the winter sun now bathing her brows in golden flame; to the silent village church; to the woods and fields and hills and hamlets, whose mute worship seemed to be mounting the skies, together with the blue smoke-wreaths from a hundred lowly homes. Her soul felt the marvelous stillness of earth and heaven, wherein it could renew and expand its powers, the better to bless that God of infinite goodness who even in this life vouchsafes to His poor creatures such manifold, wondrous bliss.

Then she turned to her betrothed.

"How beautiful!" she said in hushed tones.

"Most beautiful," he replied, "and with a beauty that is intended for our eyes. Yes, nothing befalls on earth without the dear God's ordinance or consent. The hairs of our heads are numbered. Not a sparrow falls to earth without our Heavenly Father's knowledge. Oh, yes, dear heart, be sure He has decreed that the world shall be arrayed in white to-day

and greet us with a rare and exceeding fairness. Odile, I like to think that the whole valley around us is wearing your colors—that everything in it as far as the eye can reach is of good omen and good hope and encouragement, and is even, as it were, saying prayers for us."

"Rather silent Vespers, don't you think?" said Odile, smiling.

"Silent?" cried Jacques—perhaps misunderstanding. "Why, dearest, it appears to me as though you and I had been talking heart to heart in the lane here for hours!"

For all that, he had not yet said quite all he wished to say. And he must have wanted to say it very badly, because, after seeing Odile safe home, and finding her aunt engaged in interminable gossip with the parish priest, to the sore trial of the excellent Abbé's patience, he simply insisted upon an interview at once.

As he was shown into the room the Abbé Hans arose to withdraw, but Jacques begged him to remain.

"Monsieur le Curé," he said, "you are not in the way in the least. On the contrary, your presence is required. I want your help at all the important turning-points of my life, and I have now reached a most important one. I may have sore need of your support!"

The Abbé put out both hands to him.

"My friend," he said—and the kind old priestly face lit up as he spoke—"my dear friend, you may count upon me."

Their conversation lasted a good half hour. The Squire's contribution to it must have been most uncommonly pleasant, because Odile, in her room overhead, could distinctly hear the Curè's hearty laughter and the more discreetly rippling notes of Aunt Bertha's merriment. Decidedly, the end in view was not nearly so hard of attainment as Jacques appeared to have conceived.

Presently, a much-giggling maid, very red in the face, came up from below and tapped at Odile's door. "Mademoiselle is wanted downstairs at once," she said.

"Well, now, my dear girl," cried her aunt, as she entered the room. "Just fancy! M. le Curé and I have been hearing Jacques make his confession—his general confession!"

"Have you given him absolution?" asked Odile demurely, yet with a certain agitation in her voice.

"That is precisely where we want you to help us."

"Has he committed many sins?" asked Odile.

"Only one—but a big one—a very big one!"

Here Odile remained silent for a space.

"May I know what it is?" she said at last in almost resolute tones.

"You simply *must* be told. Just think of it —he loves you!"

Odile could make no reply.

"And you are not scolding him for it?" went on Aunt Bertha, with fine mock gravity.

Odile could still find nothing to say.

"Well, if that be the case," said her aunt, midway between laughter and tears, "there is only one thing for me to do."

And she joined their hands and led them before the Abbé.

"Monsieur le Curé," she said, "please bless these two children."

"Indeed I will," he said, "and from my heart of hearts, as a priest and as a friend."

The good man then traced a slow, affectionate sign of the Cross on the bowed foreheads of the troth-plighting couple. As they rose to their feet Aunt Bertha gently pushed her niece toward Jacques.

"Come, kiss one another, my children," she said briskly. "You have my full permission to-day!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE following day turned out to be one of the liveliest in the whole annals of the manor of La Ferlandière.

The glad news of the betrothal had brought brightness once more into the lives of all connected with the farm and homestead. It was for all the world like the sun breaking out again in all his splendor after the passing of an ugly black cloud.

Jacques felt an imperative need of vigorous outdoor exercise that day, and felt it first thing in the morning. Wherefore, as the clock struck six, he sent for the bailiff to attend him.

"Well, Master Potain," he cried gaily, "is your worthy friend still making free with your potatoes?"

"My worthy friend?" stammered Potain, not understanding at first.

"Yes, your friend the boar," said Jacques.

"Oh, Monsieur de la Ferlandière," protested Potain, "I didn't dare speak to you about him again, because I could see you had other worries on your mind, but my potato-pits are simply being ruined! The brute is costing you more than twenty francs a week. He will make fat bacon, that rogue will, I can tell you."

"All right, then, I'll kill him—the day after to-morrow."

"You had better kill the whole lot of them!"

"Oh, there is more than one, then?"

"I should just think there were! There is a whole herd of them. I find fresh tracks every night since the snow. They must be telling one another—it can't be explained in any other way."

"I shall kill the lot of them!" said Jacques.

Potain looked perfectly respectful but entirely incredulous.

"I hope Monsieur de la Ferlandière will excuse me," he said, with some twiddling of his cap between his fingers. "But I am sorely afraid that Mademoiselle Odile is likely to send a good many more potatoes the same road as the last—the same road as all the others——"

"What *do* you mean?"

"What I say, Monsieur; the same road as all the others she has got on her conscience already—and they were best quality Dutch, too, in the prime of condition."

Jacques laughed till he almost wept. "Never mind, the boar will pay the bill," he said.

The bailiff shook his head dubiously.

"Well, well, Potain," said Jacques, "I see you have lost faith in me. What you want is

more work and less talk. Be it so, we shall get to work."

Dismissing Potain and returning to the room upstairs which served as a combined "den" and study, the Squire sat down and put in a solid hour writing notes of invitation to a boar-hunt, for immediate dispatch to sport-loving friends in the neighborhood. A day after wild pig was always most keenly appreciated in the Vale and its environs, especially when it could be enjoyed with the famous La Ferlandière pack of boar-hounds. For Jacques, though by no means a wealthy man, kept a pack of these splendid creatures, whose high breeding and training were the result of many years' patient work, begun by his late father and carried on by himself to such a point of perfection that he had received and refused an offer of a thousand francs apiece for pedigree bitches from his friend and neighbor at Frières, M. de Chailuy.

The first invitation to be written was naturally that for the Abbaye. Then followed cordial notes to many good people, not all of whom figure prominently in the pages of this narrative—the Delquettes, the Aubinoux, and the De Valmers, for instance—but all of them tried and true old friends, who would be delighted both to meet one another and to offer

their heartfelt congratulations to the Squire and his bride-elect.

The meet was arranged for two o'clock sharp, at One-Acre Meadow, the younger folks to ride and their elders—French fashion—to drive. The afternoon's sport was to be followed by a grand rally after sundown at the Abbaye, where Aunt Bertha would assuredly not fail to provide the customary betrothal banquet—the *dîner des fiançailles*.

In the course of the next couple of days enthusiastic acceptances flowed in on Jacques. Not one of those invited refused. This, indeed, was no more than the Squire had expected. In the uniform and tranquil if by no means monotonous routine of country life an honest diversion like a boar-hunt is the more keenly relished because, as a general rule, those taking part in it have a zest for pleasure entirely unspoiled by the stereotyped amusements of the city. Again, in the country, one can take open-air recreation in the semi-privacy of homelike surroundings, far away from the gaze of envious, inquisitive, or even apathetic lookers-on.

There was rather an anxious moment at La Ferlandière two days before the date chosen for the hunt. The glass fell suddenly, an ominous west wind began to blow up and every-

thing pointed to a break in the weather. But when the thaw came it lasted only long enough to lower the snow banks conveniently, and by Thursday morning the weather was crisply cold again. What was locally known as "Père Leblond's kerchief" showed splendidly clear in the sky, without a single dark patch, so as really to justify the odd name which likened it to an aerial handkerchief of the finest cambric. This "kerchief," then, was and still remains an infallible barometer for the Vale of Api and adjacent districts. It is really nothing more than the big rectangular section of sky silhouetted at the top of the village street between the side of the church and the tall pines across the road, which border a piece of ground belonging to Père Leblond. When the expanse of sky thus squarely framed is overcast, a good deal of rain is bound to fall in the course of the day, but when the "kerchief" shows cloudless and bright against the somber verdure of the pines, then all dwellers in the Vale may fearlessly take their walks abroad, although every other point of the compass may seem to threaten rain.

On the morning of the eventful day, the "kerchief" was in first-rate condition—almost too first-rate, in fact, for the wind was blowing north-northeast, and the hardened

snow crackled icily beneath the hoofs of horses going down to the forge to be rough-shod.

The old whipper-in from La Ferlandière had been in close communication with Potain long ere this. With the bailiff's aid he had marked down a whole herd of red-bristled boars (not to mention their sows and grice), who had impudently chosen their lairs just across the River Jouine. Moreover, the old huntsman had particularly noted, on the hither side of the stream, one particularly huge brute—"with any amount of stuff in him," as the man of kennels expressed it—who was by way of being a recluse in his mode of life. He had chosen his solitary den in a wooded hollow known locally as the Mennesis, in the very heart of the Neigerie thickets.

Potain stood out with some heat for the wholesale slaughter of all his porcine foes, in the soundest interests of the potato industry. As a keen sportsman, however, Jacques wanted to tackle the solitary first. He argued that if the great beast could be made to break cover and take to the high ground at the Guérémeaux, there might be a splendid run across country to Le Plessier and Ugny, by way of the woods that bordered the old Ham high road.

"There's no doubt whatever about it," observed the old whipper-in very thoughtfully. "Yes, if you fix it that way it will be a regular stunner of a day's hunting."

But the bailiff clung to his murderous notions and held out for them yet a while. Jacques pulled him up more than once good-humoredly.

"I tell you plainly, Potain," he said, "that I *am* going to kill them all."

"Ah!" sighed the zealous steward, "if only Monsieur de la Ferlandière would persevere in such good dispositions! But if it isn't making too free to ask the question, I should like to know how many days' hunting Monsieur is going to have after this first one?"

"Why, a good many, I hope."

"It's hardly likely."

"Why so?"

"I—I don't know."

"Poor Potain!" laughed the Squire. "You have boars and potatoes on the brain! By all manner of means, we shall go first for the hermit pig!"

With that the old whipper-in had left them to see to his preparations. He had already, on the previous afternoon, very carefully reconnoitered the solitary's movements, and now, to make assurance doubly sure, he went for a final

survey of the ground immediately adjoining the lair.

The high wind lulled at twelve o'clock and Jacques sat down to a hurried luncheon with his sister, who was in her riding-habit, ready to start at once.

"Will Odile ride a horse from the Abbaye stables?" she queried.

"No," said Jacques. "I picked her one of ours this morning."

"Which one?"

"Myrtle."

"The little chestnut mare?"

"Yes."

"Isn't she a trifle—well—a little apt to shy?"

Placid Jeanne was inclined to be needlessly alarmed when Odile's safety was at stake.

"No doubt she does shy sometimes," returned the Squire, "but she is very quiet to ride. Besides, Odile is my pupil. She rides uncommonly well."

"Shall we take Myrtle with us to the Abbaye?"

"Certainly," said Jacques, and they rose from the table.

An hour or so later the quiet rendezvous at One-Acre Meadow began to present an animated appearance. Among others who drove

instead of riding to the meet was old Etienne, the mayor, looking supremely uncomfortable in a smart new dogcart expressly borrowed for the occasion.

"What a beastly idea!" gasped his friends, as he came into view. "Why on earth didn't he keep to the sensible, old-fashioned turnout we've been accustomed to see him in so long?"

Conversation flowed on the mayor and his ways for quite a while, and the general verdict was none too indulgent. Etienne was doubtless a well-meaning man—that much was freely conceded—but his amiability made poor amends for his weakness of will and general state of indecision. It was plainly intimated that if Jacques, who had not yet arrived, only knew what points the mayor had stretched for the factory people, and even what actual surrenders he had basely made, he would not let that day pass without combining business with pleasure and having a very straight talk indeed with his official friend. Poor Etienne! The Harmmsters were harpooning him in the most vulnerable point—his tenacious love of office—and he thought by humoring them to retain the mayoral chair. He was a very simple man—as, indeed, is obvious from the very nature of his delusion.

After the mayor, the next arrivals from the

Vale comprised a couple of friendly families, very keenly engaged in conversation concerning the possibility of the Harmmsters turning up at the meet. Alberta, it appeared, had heard all about the boar-hunt the day before, and had made no secret of her wild desire to see the sport, were it only from the saddle of a bicycle.

Numbers were now filling up at the cross-roads, and the scene presented a very gay and graceful medley of riders of both sexes in all the bravery of hunting-suits and habits. Soon Jacques cantered up, his fiancée with him, riding on his left. He looked, as always, a fine figure of a man in the saddle, while Odile was more supremely charming than ever in her life before. The spirit of happiness seemed to hover about her, caressing her brows with radiant wings. Her friends noted with pleasure how firm and erect she sat in the saddle, so that the splendid mare she rode seemed hardly conscious of her weight. She wore the La Ferlandière colors, peach-red and royal blue, and was sporting a dainty cocked hat that well became her neatly braided wealth of golden hair.

It need scarce be written that Jacques kept close to her side; this was now his place of right; moreover, it was a matter of sheer, dear duty to guide and guard the girl who had given

him her heart and who would soon, God willing, be united to him, sacramentally and indissolubly. Judge, then, of his amazement and hers—to say nothing of the wrath of irascible Jeanne—when they suddenly caught sight of Alberta and Victor Harmmster in an English-built dog-cart on a stretch of sloping greensward near the road!

Jeanne pulled up her horse with a jerk. "The Jewess!" she hissed—and hissed pretty audibly, too.

"Oh," said Odile, turning completely tranquil eyes on Jacques, "it doesn't matter in the least—now."

"But I didn't ask them to come!" the Squire blurted.

"People of *that* kind," said Jeanne grimly, "have a way of inviting themselves where they are not wanted, and there's an end of it."

At this point it became desirable to drop their voices, because Alberta was manifestly making her way toward them. When she had guided the dog-cart close beside the trio she opened fire with apologies for coming thus uninvited, but explained that yesterday morning she had heard in the Vale how M. de la Ferlandière was about to go boar-hunting; that she had never had an opportunity of seeing that

particular sport; and that she would like of all things to look on—oh! only to look on. Besides, she wanted to give some token of proper feeling in the matter, because these wild boars were uncommonly mischievous beasts, were they not, Monsieur de la Ferlandière?

"Not more mischievous than other brutes," snapped Jeanne.

"Ye-es, they are—for potatoes," drawled Victor. In the raw, cold light of early afternoon his convivial complexion had become quite a study in marshy greens and blues.

However, Alberta was fully determined to have her last word. It was a word that could only have emanated from a girl quite utterly unable or unwilling to see that, as things now were, the less she had to do with other people's business the better for all concerned.

"Mind you take no risks, Monsieur de la Ferlandière," she purred. "Take care of yourself."

Jeanne's patience gave out all at once. She fell to slashing at the snow-laden branches around her with her riding-whip as the only means of self-expression left.

Luckily the two De Chailuys, with a whole bevy of other intimate friends, galloped up at this critical juncture, and their opportune arrival put an end to the very awkward turn

the conversation had taken. They had all heard of Jacques' engagement, and shook him by the hand with an especial significance of cordiality which there was no mistaking. Consequently Alberta—to borrow a phrase from the sporting press—thought it well to "retire hurt" from the field. It was particularly galling in her discomfited retreat to be made to realize that Odile was regarded by all as the lawful queen of the hunt, just as Jacques was undoubtedly its king for the day.

The time arranged to make a start after their quarry was now fast approaching. All those invited had now arrived and were ready, from the riders constituting the effective body of the hunt to the less heroic Nimrods of both sexes whose landaus, tilburies and dog-carts had been lined up on the flat stretch of hardened snow near the keeper's cottage. Not far from these latter, closer up to the keeper's little barn, and all along the field-paths adjoining it, were a number of spare saddle-horses, in charge of their masters' respective grooms, champing the bit and pawing the ground impatiently. They were for the most part splendid animals, nearly all of them having been bred on the stud-farms at the Abbaye or La Ferlandière.

On the stroke of two the old whipper-in brought word to Jacques that the under-hunts-

man had just returned from a hasty final survey of the covert. The boar still lurked there, but seemed to have scented danger, for he was restlessly pacing up and down his lair. Hence, the old man concluded, it was high time to begin, unless they wanted to see the brute break cover before a single pair of hounds had been unleashed.

Jacques cast his eye over the field. The hounds had got the scent and were straining at their leads; his friends were in readiness; they were only waiting for him to begin.

"Are you ready?" he asked Odile and Jeanne.

They nodded.

"Very well, then," he said to the huntsman. "*Go!* We'll follow you."

The man immediately unleashed a few pairs of the more powerful hounds, especially trained for purposes of attack, and started off along the forest path to the Mennesis, somewhat lustily towed thither, indeed, by the rest of the eager pack. Within fifteen minutes the big boar had been worried out of cover and was making a run for it in the direction of Voyot Farm, in the worst of bad tempers, yet by no means at the top of his speed. From One-Acre Meadow he could be seen crossing the first broad woodland track, with snout well

down, and plunging thence into the thickets. The Squire ordered the whole pack to be unleashed, and the chase, or hunt proper, began.

Notwithstanding the insolent leisure at which Sir Boar had trotted away, Jacques saw at a glance that there was rough and tough work before them. Still, he reflected, it would be good going across country, with such fine, hard snow underfoot, and only just enough breeze to keep the blood tingling in the veins.

He led the mixed field for a while, with Odile abreast of him, whilst the rest followed in their wake at a good round pace; but this method of advance did not last very long. In less than a quarter of an hour the hunt tailed off and scattered in opposite directions, not through premature fatigue, but as a result of divided counsels. Some of the riders turned their horses' heads in the direction of the not far distant water-meadows by the Saint-Quentin canal, feeling convinced that the boar must fetch up there, if he only followed his snout and continued his headlong course. Others, more familiar with the ways of the wild pig, directed their steeds along another line of country toward Flavy—and these were far and away the majority of those present. Jacques, however, did not see fit to follow their example.

"Let them go their own way," he said quietly to Odile. "For myself, I feel perfectly sure that this rogue of a boar knows his business thoroughly well, and that he is going to give himself—and us—a good time of it out Faillouel way, and nowhere else."

In point of fact, the greater part of the pack now working the coverts were no longer in full cry as heretofore, and the spare hounds held in reserve were completely at fault. Nearly a quarter of an hour elapsed before they got the scent again, and when they did it led them straight in the direction of Bois l'Abbé. Clearly the wily old Tusker had doubled back on his tracks through the clearings at Frières, and the furious baying of the hounds in that quarter confirmed the Squire in his opinion. From where Odile and he now sat in the saddle expectantly they could hear the strong music of the eager pack coming nearer and nearer, it seemed, and then—to judge by the ear—swerving around in an irregular circle, having for its center the heights of Athiémont. Jacques knew his forest by heart, and mentally marked down the long stretch of woodland in some corner of which the "kill" was bound to take place, as things now stood.

"If you feel inclined for a little hard going," he said smilingly to Odile, "now is your chance.

We can have a true boar-chase in the literal sense."

The girl assented brightly, and they set off at a brisk canter.

As was written above, Jacques knew his forest by heart. These words must be taken not only in their broadest, but also in their deepest sense. If there were some sections of woodland in the long course now traversed by the lovers showing signs of ruthless and wholesale unscientific felling, they were not those belonging to the Abbaye and La Ferlandière. The Squire's sound and intimate knowledge of forestry had taught him to deal with his timber along lines that were whole worlds asunder from the sheer vandalism of speculators with no other aim than to get rich quickly in the timber market. The grand forests of France have been incalculably injured by such men, who have sweated the last ounce of immediate profit from them, without thought of an economic morrow, to which Jacques could look forward with much tranquil assurance.

Odile followed her lover's lead through his favorite woodland ways with some interest, no doubt, in the movements of the heard but unseen pack, now baying away lustily on their right, but really chiefly happy in her keen sense of all the tender love enveloping and pervading

her like the very air she breathed. Ever and anon the Squire turned around and smiled to see the dainty maiden of his heart galloping on so seriously in his wake or closer beside him, when the paths grew broader. She had her mare well in hand, and seemed to make nothing of the minor surprises and obstacles that are never wanting in a gallop over snow-clad ground, no matter how hard the frost may have been.

"Do you know, Odile—?" began Jacques, and the question remained oddly suspended for the moment.

"No," replied Odile demurely.

"Do you know, you really and truly look a delightful little Diana of the woods this afternoon?"

She was minded to make an affectionate reply, but it remained in her heart unuttered, together with many other tender thoughts of the gallant rider at her side, who had so lately plighted her his troth in the presence of God and His priest. She was wearing his ring under the gauntlet on her bridle-hand—a golden circlet set with two stones, a diamond and a ruby. If the love in the white diamond lay a little too deep for words, what a wealth of affection, she thought, must lie stored in the glowing depths of the true

heart so well symbolized by the blood-red, burning jewel?

Besides, if her lips were mute, her pure eyes were eloquent. They spoke to her lover in the mystic language as old as the human race itself, now beaming in the depths of the lustrous pupils. Assuredly this love-light is a rich and wondrous gift from the Giver of all good things. It is a language which makes avowal of what the lips as yet dare not utter; it knows naught of the wretched limitations of the spoken word; it is a mysterious, intuitive communing between heart and heart, and soul and soul, in higher regions of human personality unknown and impervious to all influence of the senses.

As they thus rode onward they were made aware by various sights and sounds that the sometime scattered field had begun to pick up its bearings and reassemble. Glancing along the transverse bridle-paths, the two riders witnessed more than one hasty apparition of mounted groups, all making the best speed they could in the direction of Faillouel, as Jacques had foreseen. At the intersection of two main thoroughfares called the Crown Cross-Roads the pair had a distant view of Alberta Harmmster driving her English-built

conveyance, in which loomed darkly beside her the bulky form of Uncle Victor.

"Well, well! there they are again," said Odile, with a slight flick of her hunting-crop in the direction of uncle and niece.

Then, noting a vaguely troubled look in her lover's eyes, she went on in a graver tone:

"Once for all, Jacques, let me tell you—that woman's intrigues do not concern me in the least. Keep that in your mind, please. I can read the woman now, and I understand—I understand *everything.*"

"And yet," put in Jacques, "I haven't had one convenient chance of explaining——"

"Dear heart," she interrupted with the kindest, most womanly smile, "explanations have become utterly, perfectly needless." So saying, she rested her hand upon his, accompanying her action with a frank, trustful gaze.

"If you only knew, Jacques," she said, "how sure I feel of you!"

"Odile!" was all he could say, as he returned the pressure of her hand-clasp.

* * * * *

This colloquy took place when the speakers were all but emerging into the old Ham highway. Once there, they found a goodly number of their friends, with their horses sadly blown, however, and many of them in a lather, whereas

their own two mounts were fresh and their skins perfectly dry.

"Aren't you two young people taking part in the hunt to-day?" Jeanne asked with a smile.

The Squire looked at her quizzically.

"I should rather think we *are*," he replied with emphasis, "if only for the excellent reason that we are exactly as well up with the hounds as you are at this moment. Only, you see, the boar informed me confidentially that town life doesn't agree with him and that he simply can't stand railways. So he kept this side of the line, because even the level crossing was too much for his nerves. Being a hermit boar, moreover, he didn't want to be caught in the public streets of a place like Tergnier or even Quessy."

"Joking apart," said practical Jeanne, "the whipper-in says he doesn't feel at all sure of making a kill to-day. He has used up two horses and just mounted a third."

"We'll have a kill all the same," said Jacques with quiet assurance. "I can almost put my finger on the very spot where it is going to take place. It will be at Neuville—or else near the old Roman tomb, the Tombe-Régnier, you know."

"If it takes place at all!" said Jeanne irreverently.

"Swiftly turning, hunting knife in hand . . . he was just in time to meet a furious charge."—*Page* 270

"It will happen quite soon, sister mine!"

"Ah, well! We shall see," said Jeanne. Her seldom bridled tongue could not refrain from adding archly:

"The really sad part of the whole business is that your *fiancée* will have to take her share of the blame if we go back empty-handed!"

"I—I fail to see—" Odile faltered, somewhat absent-mindedly—and the rest was laughter all around.

Several of the Squire's sporting friends, however, urged upon him what they deemed the really solid grounds of his sister's misgivings. It would be a very near thing, anyway, they said, and a whole lot of work would have to be put in before nightfall, because the boar was making straight through the dense thickets bordering the forest from Ceisnel to Neuville. The light would soon fade, and besides, what an awful shame it would be to lose their quarry and go back as they came from a boar-hunt which was held in honor of a betrothal!

"Lose our quarry? Go back as we came?" thundered Jacques in a fine rage amid much good-humored laughter from the rest. Then, turning his horse, he started at a great pace along the bridle-track leading to Eight-Lane Farm. Odile and Jeanne followed

closely in his wake, and the hardier riders of the assembled groups spurred after them.

The fact is that the talk about going back empty-handed, or achieving the *"buisson creux,"* the "empty bush" so much dreaded by French sportsmen, had pricked Jacques' conscience, as was made manifest in his now thoroughly aroused activity. Hitherto he had been rather *in* the field than *of* it, for his mind had been dwelling but little on either the pleasures or mischances of the day's sport. Hence, for want of leadership, the astute foe had been readily enabled to shake off his pursuers to east and west by circuitous manœuvers familiar in the traditions of the porcine tribe, while the master of the hounds, for one day sinking the sportsman in the lover, was feeling almost grateful to the brute for thus allowing him a delightful, long, care-free gallop through the woods with the girl of his heart at his side.

Now, however, it was time for a change, and Jacques realized the fact. Overtaking a groom in charge of the last couples of relays, he had the fresh sets of hounds unleashed and took them on with him at speed. Night falls quickly in the woods, with scarce an interval of twilight. For all his ingrained woodlore, the Squire, happy man, had not given this a thought. The

bright sunshine in his heart had made him forget the decline of the less radiant orb of day.

There was little time to lose, so the end of the day's sport was strenuously made to yield full amends for whatever had gone amiss before. In less than fifteen minutes the whole of the pack, in the wake of the fresh pairs Jacques had brought, were scouring the Caumont woods so thoroughly that for the first time that day the boar halted in mid-career and glared fiercely back at the hounds. Then he plunged, with the momentum of a four-legged bomb-shell, into the heart of a dense, small thicket, impenetrable to mounted men, and girt about with a tangled undergrowth of briars, brambles, bindweed and the like, forming a kind of prickly stockade, of which the wary old warrior was now afforded the fullest possible advantage.

The first of the hounds to worm his way into the enemy's camp did not return, and the poor brute's howls of pain gave only too excellent a reason why. Two others soon followed their slain or wounded leader, and presently the whole of the pack, giving tongue most savagely, got into the enclosure and came to close quarters with an enemy they durst not despise. The fierce creature, every bristle on his body erect, stood squarely on a mound of hard snow and

gnashed at his assailants with long, yellow tusks, as though daring them to come on.

Two hounds sprang on his back and seized him by the ears. With a terrible right and left upward thrust he gored them both badly and flung them in mid-air. The other hounds fell back, and Jacques then dismounted and drew his hunting-knife. The moment he did so the boar turned and bolted through the woods again, the hounds baying furiously in his wake.

"Make for the Tombe-Régnier!" cried Jacques to his companions. "I am certain he is going there."

He was anxious to finish up as soon as might be, and so rode straight through the woods with the whipper-in, leaving his guests to take a less hazardous and longer route along the clearings. If the boar could not be rounded up and dispatched before reaching the top of the rise where stood the Tombe-Régnier, Jacques knew that Jeanne's doleful prophecy might come true. The further side of the hilly ridge was an almost precipitous descent, with a slope as steep as the roof of a house, gliding down abruptly to low-lying, thickly wooded dells, impassable, save on foot, in the best of seasons, and now lying deep in snow. It were foolhardy and worse to venture there on tired horses, and at this hour of the day.

As things were, Jacques was simply carried away by the savage ardor of the pursuit. It was truly a chase now, in the plain old French and Norman meaning of the word. The boar was in view most of the time as he scurried away, with the hounds at his heels, along one or other of the upland tracks converging at the old Roman tomb—erroneously known locally as the "Tombe-Régnier"—which was and still remains a landmark for miles around, partly because it happens to crown the eminence, but chiefly on account of the two lofty trees which stand like sentinels to right and left of it, overtopping all the rest of the forest like twin giants.

Jacques was now so well forward with the pack that the pebbles dislodged by the boar's sturdy, cloven feet came pattering down the slope beside him. His horse was unblown and still going strong, so that very few moments elapsed ere he was hardly a length behind the boar. And then, for the second time that day, the panting creature stopped in his tracks, without a moment's warning, and horse and man came almost literally down upon him, very nearly as soon as the hounds.

With one terrible snap of his powerful jaws the exasperated animal broke the gallant steed's near fore-leg at the cannon-bone.

Crack! it went, like a broomstick broken in two. And then, as when a horse goes down at the head of the squadron in a cavalry charge, there was a confused and perilous mêlée of hounds and horsemen—for the best of the other riders had by now reached the summit. Above all the noise and tumult rose the wild pig's desperate squeals and grunts, most ominously audible.

Jacques kept a cool head through it all. The magnificent blood-horse he rode—now irreparably injured, alas!—held up gamely for perhaps three seconds before going down on his knees, and this plucky pause had enabled the Squire to jump fairly free and throw the animal so that his body fell between the boar—now in the most malignant of fighting moods—and Odile, who came cantering up at the moment. Then, swiftly turning, hunting-knife in hand, with the steady pose of a matador in the bull-ring, he was just in time to meet a furious charge. The boar meant business. His bristles stood on end, his eyes glared redly, his tusks were skinned to the gums, and the wicked lower jaw was one lather of blood and foam. Two hounds fell upon him and seized him by the ears. Their attack scarcely held him for the fraction of an instant, but in the wrathful plunging of the great head to win

free from the close-set, gnawing teeth, the brute swerved ever so slightly. This was Jacques' opportunity, and he seized it. Quick as thought, and with calm and daring deftness, he drove his knife right home to the hilt in the monster's body between the shoulder blades.

The whole thing lasted no more than a minute by the clock, and yet in that brief interval it had transformed a quiet country corner into a miniature battle-field, with most of the gory accompaniments. Three dogs and a horse—to say nothing of the boar—lay wallowing in pools of blood, while Jacques, who had somehow torn his wrist while scrambling away from his fallen mount, was bleeding as freely as though the comparatively insignificant gash were a mortal wound.

Odile was considerably agitated, but she had nerve enough to keep her mare in hand, well away from the luckless horse now kicking on the greensward. In her efforts to control the terrified Myrtle, however, she had sustained a nasty blow in the side from the lopped branch of an adjacent tree, the end of which had been cut off at a sharp angle and stuck out stiffly from the trunk, some six feet or more from the ground.

The whole belated rest of the hunt now ar-

rived on the scene, with unmistakably anxious faces. Though by no means in at the death, a good many of them had seen it from the lower slopes, and there was only one question on every lip: "Is Monsieur de la Ferlandière badly hurt?"

"Not a bit of it!" cried Jacques. "The merest scratch only. But upon my word, I've never in my life known a boar to stop dead so suddenly on open ground."

Odile's services were once more requisitioned for surgical first aid. She cleansed the cut—a fairly deep and ugly one—with some handfuls of driven snow, and then bound it securely. Meanwhile her friends examined the prostrate boar, around whose carcass the hounds growled hungrily, at the disciplinary distance exacted by the old whipper-in.

It was assuredly a tremendous, brawny brute, whose head and jaws looked frightful even in death. Three grooms were told off to hoist the carcass on the back of a spare horse led by a huntsman, and hold it there more or less steadily in position, with the huge head lolling against the girth. Then they moved with their burden down hill to a forest-guard's house at the foot of the rise. It was there that Jacques had decided the *"curée"* should take place—the flaying and drawing of their quarry,

that is, and due distribution of skin, entrails and pluck to the hounds.

Before the others started, Jacques was warmly complimented all around on the iron nerve he had shown in what was undoubtedly a very tight place. Sincere and hearty as these congratulations were, however, the Squire paid little heed to them. In fact, he hardly heard what was said. He had eyes only for Odile, whose present appearance alarmed him.

"How pale you are!" he said, while she fixed the last turn of the bandage on his wrist and adjusted a safety pin.

"Well, Jacques, surely anybody of feeling would be!"

"You thought I was killed when the horse went down?"

"Either that, or mortally injured. And I offered up my life for you the moment it happened."

While saying these words she felt a sharp twinge of pain in the side where the branch had struck her, and a sudden catch came in her breath and caused her to cough. Turning aside for an instant, she put her handkerchief to her lips and withdrew it—tinged with blood.

At that very moment a decidedly different scene was taking place a mile or so away. The

moment Jacques' horse had gone down a thoughtful rider among those at the foot of the hill had reined around and galloped back to where he knew he could find the under-huntsman in charge of the remounts. On his way thither he encountered Alberta and Victor Harmmster in their dog-cart, jolting and humping over the ruts and looking as completely lost as two modern babes in the wood.

Without stopping, he bowed slightly and dropped the information:

"M. de la Ferlandière has been hurt."

Alberta reined in her mare and called after him:

"Not seriously, I hope?"

"I can't say. He may be."

"Where is he?"

"Down there—the third lane on the left, near the Tombe-Régnier, half-way to the fish-ponds."

Whereupon Alberta started off in the direction named. But whether through the excitement of her tempestuous nature or her absolute ignorance of the countless forest paths, she took a wrong turning and was soon driving away from the Tombe-Régnier, with her back well turned to it, as fast as the mare could take her. She continued in her mistaken course for about a quarter of an hour, and only recog-

nized her blunder when the cart came clattering into the tiny village street of Commenchon.

Her mood then became so unamiable that Uncle Victor deemed it wise to put in an oar. He observed very sagely—(we venture to compress his remarks)—that if he were Alberta he would leave the Tombe-Régnier exactly where it stood and calmly go home to the Vale of Api, in excellent time for dinner, without the least anxiety in the world concerning the health of the Comte de la Ferlandière. Furthermore, he added, if Vercingetorix *was* dead and done for, so much the better for the leather industry. After all, nobody had compelled the man to go galloping about into all sorts of impossible places after animals that had never so much as begged a single favor of him in the whole course of their lives.

Alberta paid no heed. She drove at a gallop halfway down the street, and then, pulling up, shouted questions to all and sundry in the nearest houses. Getting no reply, she flung the reins to her uncle, jumped down, and rat-tatted at a cottage door. A peasant-woman came out and civilly followed the girl to the middle of the village street in order to give directions more precisely. But what with the woman's patois and the over-minuteness of her instructions, Alberta had much ado to make

head or tail of the advice—which nevertheless was really simple enough. The end of the dialogue ran something like this:

"Then all I have to do is to drive straight back the way I came."

"Yes, right back."

"But how about the Tombe-Régnier?"

"Take the first paved road on the left."

"Does it lie over in *that* direction?"

"No—*this* way."

"Is it far?"

"Not a quarter of an hour from here."

Alberta then made the woman repeat her directions all over again, exercising the while all but heroic patience in her anxiety to prevent the possibility of a second mistake. Then, jumping back to her seat, she snatched the reins and drove off at a headlong pace along the road she had just been traversing.

The evening shadows were falling and a cold wind began to blow up. The road glittered with rime and was as smooth and slippery as glass in places, so that the mare, unskilfully driven and well-nigh done up into the bargain, stumbled more than once on the down gradients. Alberta had pretty well lost her head by this; moreover, her lessons in driving were matter of extremely modern history. What with her temper, then, and her ignorance, she

began to lash out with the whip very freely—a thing, to do her justice, she had never once done in her life before. As a natural consequence, the maddened mare tore along the deeply embanked roads leading through the Caumont woods to the base of the Roman tomb at a pace that was truly alarming in the circumstances. Alberta appeared to exult in it, with a heady pleasure akin to that of intoxication. It was far otherwise with cautious Uncle Victor. Half frozen on his comfortless perch, and inwardly fuming at dog-carts, nieces, and boar-hunts, especially the two latter, he now deemed it high time to put in an oar once again.

"You are simply killing the mare, you know," he growled. And then, with an instinct of self-preservation, he clutched at the reins. Alberta resisted the attempt successfully, and by no means too gently. Then she darted a withering glance at him.

"Are you afraid?" she sneered.

"Afraid? Most decidedly I am. By Jove, I *am* in an awful fear of getting my head smashed! I happen not to be in love, you see!"

"Well, then, I *am* in love!" snapped Alberta. "So there!"

Swish! went the whip on the sweating mare's quarters, and swish, swish, again, and yet again, at imminent peril of a most inglorious

smash on the frost-bound downhill road. Would they never loom even a little bit nearer those two high trees—those maddening, stationary trees that the woman had said she should make her landmarks? Her handsome, hard face and glittering eyes seemed to be saying to the heartlessly entreated mare: "Get on with you faster and faster! Lather and foam as you please! You can go to the knacker's to-morrow, so long as you carry me where I want to go to-night!"

The mare behaved much better than her mistress deserved. But when they came on the scene, as if shot from a gun, things were perfectly still once more. All the members of the hunt had dismounted and given their horses to their grooms, to be walked up and down in the comparative shelter of a small grove adjacent, while they themselves watched the quarry-giving a little further down the road. The carcass had now been flayed and drawn, and an under-huntsman was standing over it, brandishing the hide aloft, while the ravenous hounds barked frantically, hanging back as yet, however, in wholesome terror of the whipper-in, who stood on guard, upholding his whip.

Once—and then twice—the whole pack was

unleashed by the kennel-boys, at the old huntsman's order, only to be again ordered back by him to about ten yards from where he stood. This manœuver, devised to drill a pack in habits of obedience, was repeated thrice—but on the third occasion the whipper-in let his whip-lash trail without raising it anew, and the hounds fell upon their quarry. Meanwhile Jacques, in presence of the assembled company, ceremonially presented the boar's severed right foot to Odile, as first lady in at the death, or—in the prettier French sporting phrase—the "queen of the hunt."

From the semi-darkness of the lower end of the road, some hundred paces distant, where Alberta lurked like a spy in hiding, the young Jewess glared up at Odile—Odile the happy—Odile the well-beloved. As she stood beside Jacques in the fast-fading light she seemed to the other some far-away, mystic being dwelling in worlds to which Alberta's eyes were sealed. For all her haughtiness the girl in the dog-cart was maddened with jealous rage. Here she was, as proud as proud could be, and withal so completely, so piteously out of place in this great friendly gathering of simple country neighbors! Nay, she could not but feel that she was positively unwelcome, if not looked down upon with contempt. Yes, there were yawning

chasms between her and Jacques—there was religion, there was race, there was birth and breeding. Neither gold nor beauty could bridge these over for her here, whatever they might do in Paris.

In the city, of course, they were all-powerful. *There* she had only to drop her handkerchief. She had been told as much again and again, and it was no more than the simple truth. But Paris had grown insipid to her. She cared for no man within its walls, but she did care, and very passionately, for the big young Squire up yonder, the magnificent son of the soil. He looked so virile in his plain hunting-coat, with that sickly looking, horsey young woman standing so close beside him, as though she were already his wife! "Decidedly," thought Alberta, "she is far too pale in the face for such a man as *he* is. Oh, if I could only get one more chance of making him know me better! Perhaps he can't see that I love him! He may not realize what lots of money I have—what lots of beauty, too. No, he did not give me his eyes enough that night!"

A wild idea came into her head, the insolent fancy that it might be just as well to step down from her seat and make her way right into the middle of the group. Once there, she could say how-do-you-do to Jacques—inquire about

his injury—or anything else that would compel him to take notice of her, in spite of everything.

But she knew better. She felt by instinct how very much more than cool her reception was sure to be. Even now she could feel—in advance, as it were—the black looks sure to be turned upon her. After all, she was quite out of her element in this open-air life. In her present unfavorable environment she could not possibly get hold of Jacques and compromise him, as she might confidently count upon doing in the languorous atmosphere of a heated ballroom, where the smallest details can be magnified into events. In these realms of King Frost, with the gaunt, stark forest all around and about her, the obtrusion of anything in the way of pretty-pretty femininities were an appalling error of taste and tactics. Mere furbelows, frills, frisettes, and the like would assort ill indeed with the plain serge or broadcloth of the women's habits and the dark velvet or velveteen of the men's hunting coats.

In any case, any demonstration in force was now too late. The last scraps of the quarry had been devoured and the hunt was at an end. From where she sat Alberta could see Jacques shaking hands with such few of the guests as

could not come on with him to dinner at the Abbaye that night. Then all remounted and rode their several ways without taking the least notice of Alberta—indeed, without so much as seeing her.

In the eerie light of the fading west and its cold reflection from the faintly glimmering snow the long array of those going on to the betrothal feast defiled processionally before Alberta, so that—herself unseen—she was compelled to review them, as it were, and to take in the full bitterness of each and every contrast.

The cavalcade was headed by the under-huntsmen and stable-grooms, riding their wearied steeds very gently, and indeed letting them take their own time on any bits of broken ground. Next came the hounds, with softly pattering feet, looking thoroughly done up after the long day's work. They hung their heads, their tails dangled limply between their legs, and altogether the lusty vigor of their earlier adventures was extremely far to seek. The wild excitement of the chase was over, and now each dog dreamed only of the fresh straw and warm kennel awaiting him.

Then came the old whipper-in, blowing a last loud call on his bugle in prolonged, deep notes, which evoked whimpering answers here

and there from a few lost hounds in the wooded hollows to right and left.

Next came the carriages, and after these a train of ladies and gentlemen riding two or three abreast. Finally rode Jacques and Odile, conversing intimately in low, restful tones, with occasional easy gestures, as their horses paced quietly homeward. It was as though the great peace of the eventide had descended into these two hearts.

From her invisible point of vantage Alberta studied this picture in every detail with greedy eyes. Yes, it was evidently true enough that Jacques had somehow hurt his arm, but the fact did not seem to trouble him much. How well that girl rode! There was no denying it: she was a gentlewoman to the finger-tips, and her manners were none the less sweet and girlish for their indubitable distinction. What baffled and enraged Alberta above all was Odile's utter lack of self-consciousness, combined with a certain indefinable air of spiritual refinement and graciousness. Enigmatic as was this last to the young Jewess's worldly scrutiny, it was unmistakably there. And it exasperated her.

When all was over and the entire hunt had disappeared through the deepening shadows on the road to Plessier, Alberta drove out from

behind the corner of the thicket where she had taken cover so long with Uncle Victor, whose unceasing flow of expletives did not flutter her nerves in the least. When she had driven the mare to the circular clearing where the *curée* had taken place, she got down and patrolled the so lately forbidden ground, endeavoring to fix indelibly on her mind each detail of what she had seen and heard. It was here—in this particular spot, for instance—that Jacques had just been standing. *She*—the other woman—had stood *there*. And here was that other place, where they had mounted and ridden away together.

She stood near the trunk of the tree against which, five minutes before, Odile had been leaning a while.

"I can take her place *here*," said the indignant beauty—and she suited the action to the word. "If only a day would come when I could take her place *everywhere!*"

Tears of jealousy sprang to her eyes, and she pettishly dabbed them away with a tiny embroidered handkerchief.

At last she had to drag herself from the scene of this strangest of pilgrimages, where everything spoke to her of *him*—of the man who cared nothing about her—who wanted nothing to do with her—who would

fain clear her out of his way forever and always!

"Ah, Monsieur de la Ferlandière," she said inwardly, as she took over the reins from the still vituperative Victor. "Ah, Jacques, you have thrown me aside, you do not want me! No, you do not wish me to come into your life by the road of love. Beware, though. Do not trample me underfoot too long. Perhaps I may yet come into your life—and by the road of hate!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE march of events is seldom more rapid than in a newly erected industrial center. In less than eighteen months after the Harmmster factories had been in operation in the Vale very widespread and serious changes for the worse were perceptible alike in the physical aspects of the neighborhood and in the mental and moral habits of the people.

Only a year and a half before the period to which we now transport the reader the pretty township, with its picturesque commingled red and yellow roofs, had looked almost like a parterre of gold and crimson flowers in the middle of a park. A returned wanderer would now have failed utterly to know it for the same

amid the grim blocks of buildings overrunning it. The black grime on their outward walls was but a symbol of the darker soul-weariness and woebegone envy within. Also the home-comer to the Vale would assuredly lose his way among the countless mean roads and streets into which the place was cut up by unending high blank walls, now flaring with electoral bills and posters, for the most part of a demagogic and Socialistic type. Nor would he have less difficulty in recognizing a single familiar face amid the haggard, dust-grimed crowds of workmen repairing to the factory yards, with their dinner-pails in their hands. He would find it hard, if not impossible, to believe that they were the same villagers with whom he had foregathered less than a couple of years before. "If they are the same, then how they have changed," would be his verdict—and it would be a correct one.

On closer study our sympathetic observer would also find that even the best and most upright of his old acquaintances now working for the Harmmsters were totally altered men. Indeed, taking the crowd of "hands" as a whole, he would find a little of everything unpleasant that makes for pessimism in the set expression of the drawn, white faces—jealousy, pride, misgivings for the future—even

wistful regrets for a bygone, happy past, which could no longer content these men, even could it be restored.

"Surely our unhappy first parents in paradise," he might reflect, "must have had some such look as that on their faces when they first found themselves outside the gate of Eden. Their unfortunate descendants here have also eaten queer fruit from the modern Tree of Knowledge!"

The tragedy was that in the overwhelming majority of cases the change had sunk far deeper than the outward man. A returned Vale exile—or shall we say a Vale of Api Rip Van Winkle who had slumbered no more than eighteen calendar months?—would find his vaguely sinister first impressions most amply confirmed by grievous facts on minuter investigation. He would note, for example, the total absence of all the familiar cheery greetings that had fallen upon his ear—before he fell asleep—whensoever he encountered the farm-hands returning from their toil, either trudging afoot or sitting astride their plow-horses. Whereas now these very same men brushed by him in the street immersed in some journal of the kind called "advanced," or engaged in prolonging the last beery debate begun at Soupot's bar.

The awakened sleeper would further observe with some sinking at the heart that once the factory bell had clanged its impatient summons, and the big iron gates swallowed up the crowd of operatives, the whole life and movement of the place were buried with them, so that he seemed to be left standing alone in a wilderness of empty streets and abandoned fields. Perhaps here and there, at the corner of some unfamiliar slum, he might encounter a woman too sickly or too old to be a sorter or packer for the Harmmsters. But the main evidence that any human life at all survived outside the prison-like walls would have to be sought by the bewildered man in contemplation of the unkempt urchins playing here and there on waste patches of ground as yet not built upon.

This death in life pervaded the whole expanse of "Black Country" within range of the belching smokestacks for a dozen hours a day —including Sundays and holidays of obligation. At seven o'clock sharp in the evening the chief Harmmster factory again opened its gates and the employees of both sexes who had been working on the day-shifts swarmed out, while the night gangs then filed in, under the watchful gaze of the timekeeper. It was a dispiriting spectacle, this drab and dreary

"The haggard, dust-grimed crowds of workmen repairing to the factory yards."—*Page* 286

double current of jaded men and women. The former were for the most part sulkily silent, but if their lips said little, their eyes spoke volumes of unrest and revolt. The women, now wearing no covering on their heads, seemed sexless creatures—undignified, ungraceful, unmatronly. The younger ones among them had been transformed by their factory life into sallow-faced, brazen hussies, far too quick in the exchange of coarse chaff with the apprentice-lads, yet so piteously superstitious that they ran terrified to the nearest lamp-post when they saw the Abbé Hans, to "touch iron," and so avert the good man's "evil eye"!

We may now dismiss our imaginary but conscientious observer and sum up the case for ourselves.

A fierce battle was being waged, and Alberta Harmmster was direly fulfilling her threats. Jacques had refused the alliance she proposed the night of the ball, and the girl's ruling passion now was to make him aware at every turn of an implacable hostility that would stick at nothing. In her venomous plan of campaign she laid down as an axiom that her father's factories must by no means be suffered to become mere useful and lucrative (if possibly risky) concentrations of industrial effort. Concerns of this kind might be all very well else-

where. In other manufacturing centers great Christian employers of labor might devotedly safeguard their workers from the crop of evils incidental to factory life in densely populated districts. That was their affair. A factory run on Christian lines was by no means Alberta's game. She rather aimed at utilizing her father's new venture as a combined and powerfully perfidious means of information, warfare, self-aggrandizement—self-advertisement, even—in a word, as a huge weapon wherewith to deal thrust upon thrust at Jacques in his retreat at La Ferlandière and so force him from his attitude of calm and silent disdain.

Alberta experienced a vixenish glee in reflecting that whenever Jacques looked out of his window and saw the steep roofs and tall factory chimneys overtopping the rise, or caught a foul whiff from the smokestacks when a westerly wind played through his conservatory doors, or encountered on the road any men who had once called him master, half drunk and wholly rebellious—*then* he might remember the girl who had once offered him a treaty of peace at an official ball—the girl whom he had flicked aside without dreaming she could ever strike back. Whereas now she was in a very fair way of effecting the ruin of every-

thing he loved best in the world—his land, his friends, and his religion.

The fact was that Alberta's whole attitude had undergone a radical change on the memorable night of the hunt, when she had first definitely realized how hopeless was her position. Up till then she had neither taken nor manifested the faintest interest in her father's concerns, nor had she so much as set foot inside the counting-house, much less any one of the work-rooms. But ever since the close of the memorable day described in our preceding chapter she applied herself with fierce assiduity to a study of the ledgers and daybooks; kept a watchful eye on incoming orders; learned all she could about the different stages of manufacture; superintended the delivery of the raw material and the dispatch of the finished products, and even gave attention to such improvements as could be effected in the machinery, tools, and general running plant.

In earlier days she had never once deigned to exchange a pleasant word with any of the local peasantry. So far as she was concerned, it was much the same as though they did not exist. But now she made a point of cultivating their acquaintance with honeyed words, and—a great thing for her—she invariably acknowledged their salutes.

The better to win them over, and so further her ulterior ends, she took endless drives up and down the Vale with the fevered zeal of some deputy making his electoral canvass. In the course of these expeditions she always felt unable to maintain self-control, and leave her thirst for at least some small installment of immediate revenge unslaked, whenever she passed the Bois Roux and was consequently nearing the La Ferlandière estates. The mere fact that she was in the vicinity of the latter made her fling to the winds the most elementary notions of common good form, as understood among land-owning country neighbors. She would start gossiping over the hedge or by the roadside with any of Jacques' laborers she saw working in his fields, and hardly a day went by in Fumeçon or the Neigerie—the two hamlets where most of the farm-hands from the Abbaye and La Ferlandière lived—without some such conversation as the following taking place at the corner of the nearest field:

"Well, Mathieu, is it going to be a good crop?" Alberta would begin.

"Pooh!" the peasant would make reply, with the world-old grimace of tillers of the soil—that protrusion of the lower lip which surely must date from the delving days of good-man Adam himself. "Pooh! A good crop,

eh? I don't think it will be much of a crop."

"But then it never really *is* much of a crop, is it, Mathieu?"

"Why, no, surely. There is always something against us. There is frost, or hail, or perhaps we get too much rain, or else not enough of it—the vines are swamped out, or else they are scorched up by the sun, and everything else with them. It's hard lines working in the fields, and no mistake." Rustic human nature, like every other variety, is fond of croaking during business hours.

"Then why don't you give up working in the fields?" Alberta would ask, with a fine air of innocent surprise.

"Give it up, Mademoiselle? It is all very well for *you* to talk like that, with no end of money in your pocket, but how about us? We've got to live; we've got to earn our daily bread before we sit down to eat it."

"That is true, Mathieu, but you wouldn't merely earn your daily bread at the factory, but something nice to spread on it, and something to put by for a rainy day as well."

This was coming to the point. The rustic would straighten his back, square his peaked cap over his brows, and eye Alberta furtively.

"Are you so very sure of all that, Mademoiselle?" was generally his next venture.

"Absolutely certain."

"How much wages do they pay, then, at your factory?"

"Three francs, four francs, four and a half, and up to five francs a day."

"Five—francs—a day!"

The man with the spade would pensively spit on his hands and take his tool again, to dig steadily away for minutes on end without comment, as if trying to shut out all preposterous if dazzling temptations. Alberta would bide the man's time. She never pressed the point at this stage. Generally she filled in the gap with gossip about indifferent matters, so as not to weaken what impression she might have made.

Then the peasant would hark back of his own accord to the thing that mostly mattered—cash.

"Is it sure and certain they give five francs a day at your place?"

"Ask for yourself—ask any of your friends down in the Vale. And then, if you feel inclined, have a try for the money."

This was her parting shot as a rule. She would drive away, leaving the man to ruminate

over her words while she proceeded further on her canvassing rounds.

It need hardly be written that Soupot was one of her sturdiest allies. Moreover, the local journals had all been bought up by her father and were now kept busy manufacturing public opinion in support of industrial interests, so that with one thing and another the more golden aspects of the vexed factory problem were constantly and alluringly being paraded before the eyes of all, with the inevitable result of casting untutored minds into perplexity and awakening in them alternate doubts and dreams of an amazingly roseate future.

And first as to the doubts. The born tiller of the soil had many of these. He felt dimly that it was a desperate thing to abandon the good, brown, fragrant, mysterious earth, beneath whose rugged lineaments the whole animate soul of created nature seemed somehow to be struggling for self-expression. After all, this earth belonged to him. This soil, this land, was *his*, and had been his father's and his grandsire's before him. All his forebears slept their last long sleep beneath it, like children slumbering on a mother's breast. Their dust was commingled with it; their memories made it holy ground. Why should he, their descendant, now leave it and moil and toil within factory walls? Such an act was surely treason in

the eyes of all who had gone before him into rest, after lives laboriously spent in adding rood to rood and acre to acre. Again, the crime had so much that was otherwise dreadful. It meant forfeiting life in the open air, where fresh breezes blew from all the ends of the earth, and exchanging for it the fetid atmosphere of overcrowded workrooms, the chemical aroma of new-made leather, and the frank stench from the hides and tan-pits. It meant saying good-by during working hours to the blue vault overhead and slaving away under a sort of cellar roof, alive with buzzing wheels and driving-bands, and all other man-trap perils of unguarded running-gear. It involved the sacrifice of a life where the peasant need call no man his master for a life of servitude under Jewish owners, at the beck and call of every overseer and foreman, and amid the spite and ill-humor of peevish fellow-workmen. Perhaps he might not be able to set foot inside a church for the whole of the rest of his life without becoming a butt for the jeers and horseplay of his new companions. At best he would have to endure their silent contempt if he persisted in going to Mass. That kind of thing would never do. "No," he would resolve—or think that he resolved, while the mood was on him—"I shall never take on work at the factory—never!"

Soon the pleadings of the other side would come up for hearing. The average peasant, with whom we are mainly concerned, was prepared to concede much, after playing with a whole litany of plausible "ifs." If a quiet, unvarying round of regular toil meant getting hopelessly behind the times—if town life spelled progress while country labor was identical with loutish ignorance—if money were the only real power worth possessing and wielding —if every man were bound in duty to worry about the future, and if the sole means of making provision for the years to come were money, money, money all the time, why, then, the tall, dark young lady might be right in her views after all! Besides, these factories might not be quite so black as Monsieur de la Ferlandière and his friends chose to paint them. Certainly some of the men employed at them had raised complaints, but then by far the greater number not only enjoyed the new work, but openly said so. In any case, no particular harm could be done by trying a job for a while, especially if the experiment could be made at the beginning of the winter season, when the corn harvest and all other main crops were safely over.

Revolving these things in his mind for days and days, a field worker "under treatment" by Alberta Harmmster was bound sooner or

later to descend from the abstract to the concrete.

"Well, now, there's myself," he might say at their next meeting. "Am I to understand that I can get a job at your factory in October?"

"Whenever you like."

"And what money would you pay a man like me? I'm not so young as I used to be, you know."

"Perhaps not, but they could take you on in the warehouse and start you at three francs fifty a day."

The temptation was now more direct, if not as yet by any means triumphant. Three francs and a half by the day seemed a solid reward indeed when contrasted with the mere hope of a perishable harvest that now kept the man toiling year in, year out. Full sorely harassed, he would hoe his rows for the rest of the day with a decided limpness of the arms and a whole world of care in his badgered head. The wily young "sportswoman" had not yet bagged her bird. She had not brought him down. But without a shadow of doubt she had winged him.

From time to time the outlying larger hamlets, and even the remotest tiny clusters of isolated cottages, were inundated through the post by copies of newly established journals—

the *Vale Sentinel,* for example, and the *Frilleux Watchman.* Both of these had been brought into existence by the Harmmsters to bolster up their own and their shareholders' interests. The country folk were rather nervous about tearing the wrappers at first, for fear of being expected to pay for the things, but they soon discovered from local gossip that the copies were mailed gratuitously, and then they very naturally took to devouring them in the family circle around the fire during the long winter evenings.

Systematic propaganda of this sort hardly needed a finishing touch, but, such as it was, this last was amply provided by talk in the taverns and at the local political meetings. Then things began to happen. Slowly at first, and in a shame-faced sort of way, one following the other like sheep, and guilty looking sheep at that, the younger men began the exodus. The elders then took heart, and the rush became a stampede, by families first, and then almost by whole hamlets at a time. At the point our story has reached men were putting down their names in advance and soliciting others for letters of recommendation to the foremen. In fact, simply anything in the way of immediate employment at the works was being begged and prayed for as a boon.

Nathan Harmmster was none too pleased by this. In fact, he was disposed to regard the influx with some measure of concern, if not of positive alarm. But his daughter was ever at his elbow coaxing and urging him on—indeed, straining her utmost powers to launch him definitely on a policy of hiring extra local labor every week of his life. She had her own plan of campaign, and she had it well fixed in her head.

"Why not find work for simply every pair of arms that comes along?" she said one day. "You can afford to do it, with the heavy orders coming in."

"That state of things can't continue, my girl. If I take on more hands at present I shall only have to put them off again later, and so run the risk of having the whole place against me when the elections come on."

"Orders," said Alberta very firmly, "*will* continue to come in, I tell you, and you will *not* be obliged to turn off a single hand. And what is more, every one will be pleased—except *him*."

"Except whom?" queried her father.

"That is my business," she replied, with a singularly ugly smile.

The next important move in Alberta's

scheme of military operations was an advance in force upon Paris. There she embarked upon a planned series of eager, hustling interviews with the heads of great commercial houses and also with the more impressionable givers of Government contracts. She put her whole heart and soul into the work, and threw into the balance, moreover, whatever of seductiveness and siren-like charm she had received by nature or acquired and developed in society circles known, even in French, as "smart."

Stout Victor was at once amazed and delighted. "Why," he declared to his brother one day, "that girl of yours is different altogether from what she used to be!" "That's a fact," agreed Nathan Harmmster. "I don't know her myself for the same girl these last few months."

In the seclusion of his official sanctum the great managing director then rubbed his two soft palms together and indulged in sweet self-gratulation. To think he had a daughter like that!—a mere chit of a girl of twenty, yet one who, forgetting all about chiffons and lace and dances and theater-parties, was taking up her time with shoe-leather, shoes, and shoe-pegs—yes, and pushing her old father's business with really a sort of fanatic zeal! Most decidedly

she was a thoroughbred—a true daughter of the tribe. It was by no means every man's luck to have a daughter like *that.*

Alberta endured all manner of praise and compliment from her father with the utmost unconcern. But there were days when she went up to her room and opened the balcony casement, as on a former occasion, at the beginning of her life in the Vale. She would step out on the stone parapet and there lean with both arms on the coping, looking out to where, beyond the Neigerie, lay the red roofs of La Ferlandière. Her musings were many. Would this famous agrarian leader—as she was wont sarcastically to call him these days—*never* show any more signs of life than at present? What really *was* going on yonder inside that silent, stolid old pile of masonry, where the foe, it seemed, was determined to keep always lurking under cover? "Surely," she would say, "the way I have chosen to attack him must be cutting him to the heart!"

In this wise Alberta's hate grew all the greater in the measure of her absolute ignorance as to what pain she might or might not be causing.

* * * * *

Jacques was a long way from being as impassive as the stone walls that concealed him

from the prying eyes on the balcony. He was like some dweller on a low-lying coast during exceptionally high spring-tides, who watches the threatening advance of the waves, yet conceals from his family certain alarms which, however keen, may after all prove quite ungrounded. Jacques studied Alberta's tactics with considerable anxiety. There were many quiet evenings when he would pause in his walk through the outlying fields and take a good long look at the smoke-grimed Vale of Api, debating within himself the manufacturers' ultimate schemes, and wondering much what the reckless Alberta's immediate aim could be.

In the beginning, it must be admitted, Jacques had completely failed to divine what the girl was after at all. This was hardly surprising. Alberta Harmmster was one of those women concerning whom male critics—even their relatives—say: "You never know, you know." But she had also the temper as well as the subtleness and sinuosity of the wildcat, and felt no scruple whatever about showing both teeth and claws the moment a chance had come of mauling the foe, after no matter how many stealthy days employed in tracking him down. Such an opportunity offered in the summer, and she neither could nor would refrain from

using it, and thus making her malignity manifest to all.

One morning in early July Jacques was starting to walk to the Abbaye for news of Odile, who had been none too well the day before. When he emerged, by the white post at the top of the avenue, into the main road, he was disagreeably surprised to find bills posted on the trunks of all the poplars along the sweeping curve in the road around the La Ferlandière fish-pools. The presence of these pasted sheets seemed somehow a personal challenge, and he was irresistibly impelled to stop and read the one nearest to hand. It ran as follows:

TOWNSHIP OF THE VALE OF API

Official Inquiry into Complaints

Notice is hereby given on behalf of the Mayor to all inhabitants of the township and other constituent parishes of the Vale of Api that a formal proposal has been duly lodged by the Messrs. Harmmster Brothers in the mayoral offices touching the erection, on the rising ground situate within the Bois Roux, of a nail-factory, and also of extensive premises to be utilized for the purpose of drying tawed skins. All complaints and objections on behalf of interested parties must be submitted at the mayoral offices not later than six o'clock on the evening of July 13th, 19—. The Mayor is in attendance daily from 2 to 4 P. M.

(Signed) The Mayor
ETIENNE.

Jacques read the above twice over, scarce able to believe his eyes. There were excellent

reasons for this bewilderment. In the first place he himself, and no other, had bought the Bois Roux shooting for the season. What was to become of his sporting rights? Then, again, such a proposal—a plan to make nails on the top of hilly ground two miles away from anywhere—was downright absurd on the face of it. Finally, the Bois Roux was the freehold property of Etienne himself, an old personal friend, who surely could be no willing party to any arrangement like the present, which would make Odile's life at the Abbaye impossible from the day when it took effect. While he thus mused amid the long morning shadows cast by the much-placarded poplars he had a quick glimpse of the whole truth so suddenly that he clapped his hand to his brow with the pain of it. Alberta's main scheme now shone luridly, flash upon flash.

Outside the not extensive limits of the Bois Roux, the whole district thereabouts formed part of the demesnes of the Abbaye and La Ferlandière. Yet the wood, quite small as it was, was so situate as to form a point of the highest strategic importance in the present and future agrarian campaigns. Although the summit was far from Alpine in actual height, its approaches were unusually steep, and thus, bestraddling the course of the two main roads

as it did, the Bois Roux was almost as effective a barrier as a mountain range in isolating the twin estates from the commercialized communes further down. Even on occasions of national festivity, like the fourteenth of July, holiday-making factory hands were deterred by the stiff rise in the ground from getting much nearer to the Abbaye and La Ferlandière than the toll-gate at Brésolettes, which was quite distant enough for the comfort of those most concerned. And then, again, quite apart from the steepness of the acclivity, the stern solitude of the vast expanse of fields beyond and around the Bois Roux held no particular attraction for the tired souls of machinists and other operatives bent on spending a lively day, even though so many of them were countrymen born and bred.

And now for the other side of the picture—Alberta's side. The very moment a factory was erected on top of this wooded height the situation would be utterly changed, and for the worse. The building itself would be a standing challenge to the Abbaye and La Ferlandière. The former would be poisoned with rank odors under Jacques' very eyes, and he would be impotent to aid. Still less, if possible, would be his power to save Odile's home life from the subtler contamination arising

from the settlement, so near her gates, of a largely Socialistic and irreligious population. To crown all, the scheme as set forth in the mayoral notice would enable Alberta Harmmster herself to dive into the calm current of two hitherto tranquil lives. The new branch factory overlooking them could be her convenient watch-tower, whence she might espy at her ease all their comings-in and goings-out. There would be nothing to prevent her from prying into actual details of their housekeeping or even from focussing her shameless eyes upon the sacred intimacies of courtship and wedded life.

Yes, thought Jacques very sadly, Alberta's hand was emphatically in this. Such a refinement of treachery, so completely perfidious a cruel deed, could only have been thought out by a woman madly in love. Bearing this in mind, he made his way back to the house and had a horse saddled; then, without stopping at the Abbaye, where he was by no means sure of being able to remain self-controlled in Odile's presence, he rode straight to the mayoral offices in the Vale, thinking to find Etienne there at his desk as usual. However, the mayor had just left and gone home to his private residence, he was told.

The Squire was fully determined to see his man, and made his way to Etienne's house accordingly. The maid-servant who answered his knock was new to the place and a personal stranger to Jacques. In a mumbling kind of way the girl informed him that "Monsieur Etienne was out and not expected home till evening."

"All right," observed Jacques drily. "Go and tell him that his friend, M. de la Ferlandière, is here and simply must have a word with him, the sooner the better."

"B-but—but I have told Monsieur that Monsieur Etienne is out——"

"Very well, do what I tell you."

The maid stood where she was, and Jacques took to pacing to and fro in the center of the quadrangular court, well away from the shadows cast by its creeper-clad walls. His patience gave out after a very few minutes of this kind of thing, especially as he now felt surer than ever that the mayor was playing him false. Determined to stand no further nonsense, he went under the first-floor windows and thundered out, "Etienne! Etienne!" at the top of his voice.

The corner of one of the window-blinds was cautiously lifted from within and instantaneously dropped. It was no more than the

merest flicker, well-nigh as instantaneous as the leap of a camera shutter. But Jacques had seen it.

Without a word to the scandalized maid he stepped inside, ran up the staircase, tapped at a door, opened it, and quite naturally found himself confronting Etienne—a very red-faced Etienne, standing up by a table strewn with building-plans and estimates. Jacques looked him well in the face, and the mayor returned his gaze pretty steadily, albeit with a certain embarrassment.

"There are reasons, then, for not being at home to old friends?" began Jacques.

"But——"

"Never mind, I have come to do you a good turn, all the same. One good turn deserves another, you know, and you will remember how you came to me about two years ago to get me to turn up at the Harmmster ball. You remember claiming that it was a real service you were rendering me then?"

Etienne looked this way and that, not knowing very well for the moment what line to take.

"Yes, I wish to be of service to you," pursued Jacques. "Just imagine, Etienne, somebody or other has had the audacity to stick up copies of an abominable poster all over the place near

La Ferlandière, and what is worse, they have printed your name at the bottom of the thing. I have come to ask you if you know anything about it."

"What kind of notice is it?" faltered Etienne.

"Oh, the contents are a very simple matter. The Jews—you know the ones I mean—those shoe and leather people—give formal notice of their intention to build a couple of branch houses of their main factory within five hundred yards of the Abbaye. Can this be true?"

"Well, I can do nothing in the matter!"

Thereupon the Squire folded his arms and gazed with real pity on the white-haired elderly figure before him—the figure of a man whom only wild dreams of ambition and avarice could have brought to this pass.

"You can do nothing in the matter?" he said, emphasizing the other's words. "Is that the only answer you can find? And so, Etienne, my dear old friend, whom I have known and valued these twenty years as one of the good old stock that always stood by the land, you, too, have gone over to the other side? Surely it is rather late in life for you to turn your coat and go back on all your old principles? Stop while there is still time, I entreat

you. These new friends of yours are already stealing your sense of honor from you. Yes, they are, Etienne, because you have just told me an untruth on their account. You have said you could do nothing in this matter. Now, you know you are mayor of the Vale of Api to begin with, and in the next place the Bois Roux is your own property, absolutely freehold and without encumbrance. On a double score, then, you are in a position to control the situation absolutely. This dreadful thing simply *can't* be done unless you want to see it done. Oh, Etienne—and I had always looked upon you as a friend!"

"I am still a friend."

"Then why are you stabbing me in the back? Why do you provide my enemies with weapons to use against me—and, what is far worse, against my little Odile? Surely you must know that any attack on the Abbaye must cut me to the quick!"

"I don't know what you mean," said Etienne sulkily.

"You don't know what I mean? Oh, indeed you do! And it is very hard on me, a younger man, to have to say to one of my seniors what I must say—and what I do say. It is this: You are possibly deceiving yourself, but you have certainly deceived me. Into the bargain

I have to tell you that you were not the first to think of selling the Bois Roux."

"No, I admit I was not."

"It was Alberta Harmmster's idea!"

"Oh, did she tell you, then?" blabbed Etienne naïvely. He was unable to keep on playing a part for any length of time.

"No," answered Jacques, "but I am sure of it all the same."

"How strange!" muttered Etienne, in the tones of a man talking to himself.

"It was a matter of hard cash, I take it?" suggested Jacques, following out his own line of thought.

"Oh, quite so," returned Etienne, with a note of animation for the first time during the interview. "Alberta came herself to the office and made the proposal. It was such a good business offer that any man would have jumped at it."

"A good business offer?" repeated Jacques bitterly. "Is that what you have come to, Etienne? So the near neighborhood of the Harmmsters has infected you to this extent that the words 'a good business offer' have enough black magic in them to drive everything else out of your mind! All you have got to say henceforth whenever you feel pestered by memories of the land that was so dear to you

or by any wistful thoughts of the old friends and neighbors, perhaps mixed with a twinge of regret for the present state of things—all you need say is simply, 'Keep quiet; I have got a good business offer.' "

"Don't you think you are exaggerating?"

"By no manner of means. A factory building facing the Abbaye gates is a really foul trespass on the one little corner where we had meant to spend our lives in peace. It puts a deep black margin on the picture of happy married days we had every reason to expect. You have chosen a nice gift, old friend, for your wedding-present. I am much obliged to you, I assure you."

"Monsieur de la Ferlandière!"

"Well, how many halfpence are they going to give you?"

"Thirty thousand francs."

"It is a lot of money for the Bois Roux, but far too low a price for your reputation among old friends and neighbors."

"The whole place is with me."

"The newer section of it, I admit, but not the old inhabitants, from whom you are sprung and who confided their interests to your hands, believing them to be clean ones. That part of the population, Etienne, will have a long and a bitter remembrance of your treason."

"But just think, Monsieur de la Ferlandière —thir-ty thou-sand francs!"

"Thir-ty thou-sand francs!" mimicked Jacques. "Yes, Judases are dear!"

The mayor literally jumped at this appalling insult, but Jacques put out his hand at once, as if in regret for the fierce word spoken.

"Etienne," he said more quietly, "just one last word. I have a request to make of you."

"It is refused in advance."

"I daresay you will refuse it."

"Make up your mind that I shall."

"Well, then, I suppose you regard the whole transaction as a mere matter of business."

"Decidedly."

"Simply and solely a business matter."

"Of course," replied Etienne with a snarl and much apparent relish.

"That being the case, I can make you a better offer!"

The mayor peered at him with the peculiarly suspicious gaze of a bargain-driving boor at market, when he is wholly at a loss for the other man's meaning.

"I tell you again," repeated Jacques, "that I can make you a better offer."

"You couldn't if you tried," said Etienne baldly.

"We shall see about that," continued

Jacques. "Meanwhile, may I depend upon it that you really are going to get thirty thousand francs?"

"Yes, I have Alberta Harmmster's word for it."

"Very well. Now to business. Put the wood up to auction, and I make you a definite promise to raise the bidding."

Etienne was struck silent. He had never once hitherto given a thought to bringing the wood under the hammer, and the reason was not far to seek. When Alberta had come around with her offer a few evenings before, he had not dreamed that any one else would care to outbid her. The heavy lump sum tendered had dazzled him, too, because, as a mere source of income, the Bois Roux was rather a poor property. However, Alberta would certainly be good for her price in the auction-room, so that he stood to win by the Squire's proposal. In cases like Etienne's, too, where a man has penuriously succeeded in hoarding a fortune by lifelong scrimping and saving, the prospect of seeing the pile increased by some thousands of francs at a single sitting is apt to upset the strongest resolutions. Wherefore he soon broke silence and announced in almost a swaggering tone the decision to which he had arrived, by the road of the love of lucre.

"I like your idea," he said, looking Jacques in the face, "and I shall act upon it."

There was a hard, defiant note in the words, as, indeed, there had been for some little time past in the tone of the mayor's remarks. It was only at the outset of the interview that Etienne showed a few signs of weakness, when openly brought to book for unneighborly and unfriendly conduct. He was now endeavoring, with good measure of success, to regain composure by frank acceptance of all the consequences of his present line of action. He could see by the pained look in the other's eyes that Jacques was genuinely sorry for him, and he resented this compassion with all the spite of his petty heart and soul. He resolved from that hour to take his stand as an open partisan of the Harmmsters. The manufacturers, he told himself, now lived and moved and had their being at his very doors. He had to rub shoulders with them somehow, whereas Jacques lived right away from the scene of action, and in so very remote a part of their world that his former friend could well afford to get along without him.

After the mayor's last words Jacques had moved to the door, but he turned again at the threshold to say something by way of closing this strange and most unpleasant interview.

"I may go away, then," he remarked, "with the hope of being allowed to make a fight for it?"

"Yes," returned Etienne—and he added sarcastically, "but you will fight without ammunition and you will lose. In fact, you are beaten already. The bullets are going to be made of banknotes this time, remember."

"Perhaps I may lose and perhaps I may not," said Jacques.

And he withdrew and went his way without shaking hands.

The factory dinner-hour had struck when he remounted and regained the street. Rightly or wrongly, it seemed to him that he was being stared at uncivilly by the passing groups of operatives. Had it come to this, then, that he was thenceforth to be regarded and treated as an adversary by his own familiar folk in the neighborhood that was home to him and them? It certainly looked like it. Disagreeable remarks reached his ears from time to time; certain workmen whom he had known cut him dead and passed on when he greeted them, while others of his acquaintance who chanced to be taking up a good deal of space in the middle of the road in front of him, and could quite easily have gotten out of his way, delib-

erately abstained from doing so. These petty annoyances were no more than straws, but they showed the Squire which way the wind was blowing.

It amounted to this. While he had been taking the war quietly in his tent at La Ferlandière, cultivating his fields and looking forward to his wedding-day, the enemy had stolen a march upon him. He had now to deal with a frontal attack in force, although his assailants were for the most part hidden under cover as yet. His attitude of passive resistance had given them ample time, as was manifest in the apostasy of so elderly and leisurely a man as Etienne, who had long passed the period of life when a man can change his opinions in twenty-four hours or so. There must have been any amount of parleying, palavering and humoring before so much as a beginning could be made in the work of undermining the mayor's long-standing, inherited principles. Alberta Harmmster clearly knew her business well, and was bringing to very evil perfection the bad work Soupot had begun. All these and similar forebodings were soon amply confirmed in the course of conversation with various friends on whom Jacques called in the course of his passage through the town. He had much food for thought on his homeward ride that day.

* * * * *

The following morning Alberta received a communication from Etienne apprising her of a slight modification of the arrangement originally agreed upon between them. "For purely private and personal reasons"—ran the note—"the sale of the Bois Roux will take place by public auction, in the mayoral offices of Brésolettes (being the parish in which the property is situated), at half-past nine on the morning of July 13th." A mere circumstantial change like this had nothing in it to annoy, much less disquiet, Alberta. She felt fully convinced that her lavish offer would be far too much for other would-be purchasers, even if any such turned up in the auction-room, a contingency which was by no means likely.

"This latest move of the mayor's," she reflected, "must be one of his little political dodges. He has one eye on votes and another on me. He wants to save appearances by a run with the hare and a hunt with the hounds. Clever Master Etienne! So that is your game! We shall see which is the cleverer, you or I!"

However, she found herself wondering more than once that day whether there might not be somebody in the district both able and willing to balk her plan. It could not be Jacques. He was penniless. Nor could it be any of the farmers, or any combination of them. They

were practically beggared to a man. Then who could it possibly be?

By a steady process of elimination she came back to her original opinion, viz., that the whole thing was a somewhat transparent ruse on Etienne's part; a ruse, too, that she could readily turn to his disadvantage. For instance, she determined to make a much lower opening bid at the sale than the price she had offered him privately. This would only serve him right, she considered. He had gone back on his word and left her perfectly free to do the same. Another great point gained from the mayoral manœuver was that henceforth her people and herself could feel dispensed from the nuisance of paying court to Etienne as a more or less independent man in office. As to the effect of the mayor's present action on her plan of campaign and the general trend of events, it would be nil.

Wherefore, on July 13th, a little after nine in the morning, Alberta was in the highest good humor as she rode over to Brésolettes in her motor-car for the auction, accompanied by her father and Uncle Victor.

The time of year being what it was, all three wore the lightest of summer apparel, Alberta looking especially radiant in a delightful new gown, and demeaning herself like an overjoyed

schoolgirl home for the holidays on her way to her first big party. The journey was on other grounds inspiriting. Everything seemed gay and good-humored in the bright morning sun; even the taverns they passed on the road were sprucely decked out with flags and streamers, for it was the eve of the National Fête. The road wound along between fields of wheat and rye and shone dazzling white in the radiant sunshine, but the heat was not yet oppressive, being tempered by a pleasant breeze, in which the ripening harvests swayed like seas of tawny gold. Farther down on the horizon the very wood whose ownership was so soon to be disputed seemed to cut the highway in two with its dark green clustering oaks and their outlying range of scattered bowlders, glinting purple in the distance.

When they reached the long uphill rise approaching Brésolettes, Alberta's spirits became exuberant. She pointed with the tip of her sunshade to the various desirable aspects of her intended purchase, so far as they were now visible from where she sat in the car. She knew her subject by heart, however, for she had been over the ground again and again in the bygone weeks, like a commander-in-chief spying out the land on the eve of a general engagement. In all discussions with her father and uncle,

however, she had been far from explicit concerning the object she really had in view. She certainly mentioned the exquisite discomfiture of the Abbaye and La Ferlandière, but merely as a minor matter, a casual though wholly delightful coincidence, which might, perhaps, pass muster as one reason the more for making an investment in other respects desirable. The actual site, she contended, although practically valueless as real estate in the present condition of the market, would speedily rise in value with the general development of the district. The sharp increase in the price of building land, so marked in the Vale of Api since the erection of the tanneries, would extend to the Bois Roux neighborhood when the branch factories had been put up. Alberta adduced various reasons in favor of constructing the nail-works and forges on a site so thoroughly isolated; dwelt much on the perfect ventilation secured for the drying-sheds; and wound up by detailing a plan for workmen's cottages to be built on a portion of the site and let out—compulsorily—at rentals to be deducted from the men's weekly wages.

Turning then to a possibly darker side of her picture, Alberta maintained that even if it should ultimately be found impracticable to build factories at such a height, the plateau of

the Bois Roux commanded so fine a view of both the valleys beneath that it would make an ideal site for the construction, a little later on, of a sumptuous château worthy of the Harmmster dynasty, and overlooking the very scene of their triumphs.

To all of which Nathan Harmmster had many times demurred by shaking a dubious head, although otherwise he had listened patiently enough to his daughter's eager plea.

"Listen to me, my girl," he said when finally she had finished. "I am not at all convinced by your arguments, because, if your idea were to be carried out, I would have a whole host of difficulties to contend with that you know nothing whatever about. But let us put it this way. Do you want this wood—the Bois Roux as they call it?"

"Yes."

"You have taken a fancy for it—a sort of longing, eh?"

"Oh, something better than that," corrected Alberta, desirous to play her play out to the end.

"Never mind. Even if there are no better reasons, but simply and solely a fancy you have got in your head, I am perfectly willing to buy the ground for you. You have done such wonderful work for the business this last

year that really I think it ought to be rewarded in some way. Don't you agree with me, Victor?"

"Oh, certainly," said that portly person—rather mechanically, however, and through teeth that retained their hold on a good cigar. He was dreaming of the frothing iced beer that must assuredly be going on the boulevards at that moment, in cool anticipation of a hot Parisian day.

This twofold appreciation sent Alberta into raptures. She forthwith let loose with both barrels, so to speak, and not only kissed her father on her right, but passive Uncle Victor on her left. Expansive performances of this nature were so extremely rare in the latter gentleman's experience that he forthwith became—and remained for quite a while—most horribly suspicious of his niece!

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The town-hall clock at Brésolettes was striking ten when the motor pulled up at the mairie, after the normal amount of chug-chugging, and amid the equally normal accompaniments of petrol-reek and dust.

The sun was now high in the heavens, and cast but a narrow strip of shade on the pavement adjoining the mairie door. Accompanied only

by Djinn, Odile's spaniel from the Abbaye, Jacques was walking up and down there, awaiting, with what patience he might, the day's events. He was first to bow when the trio stepped down, but only because one of their number was, technically speaking, a lady. Indeed, his correct and formal salute was so markedly frigid that it obviated all possible attempts at conversation and put the others very literally in their proper places. The two men returned his bow as they passed in through the door, and then glanced at each other in some surprise to find him there. Alberta did not bow. She followed her father and uncle and looked straight in front of her with an assumption of indifference, and even some slight air of haughtiness. But inwardly she felt completely staggered.

Because never once, not even for a single moment, had she dreamed that Jacques could put in an appearance on the actual scene of what must prove for him an ignominious defeat. In fact, it was precisely because she had felt so sure he would keep out of the way that she had thrust pins into him as publicly as possible by having all those needlessly profuse notices of inquiry pasted on the trees at the top of La Ferlandière Avenue. And this, too, at a time when her victory was a mere routine matter of

private purchase, effected away from the glare of the limelight.

There was really some ground for Alberta's bewilderment. As a matter of fact, Jacques was not a rich man. He owned land, it was true, and he owned a good deal of it. But the very extension of his demesnes had lessened the amount of available capital now standing to his name in the bank, especially since during the bygone year he had sacrificed the better part of his income, and even sold some securities, in order to purchase every plot of ground left vacant by small proprietors giving up the land, and taking up work at the factories.

From her convenient corner-seat Alberta observed Jacques closely as he paced up and down the long room, occasionally halting and looking out of the middle window, which commanded a view of the wooded height they were so soon to fight about. The young man's face was stern, and even overcast with a look of suffering, very patiently endured. He was paying no heed to the Jewish group, and Alberta could safely focus her piercing eyes upon him in an endeavor to divine what thoughts might be passing in his mind. It mattered little what were his plans, she reflected. He was now only at the beginning of the troubles in store for him. *She* would show him in a

minute or two the plain cold truth of the couplet about love to hatred turned. "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." In view of this speedy triumph she had chosen the corner-seat, with her back well turned to the light, in order to have full opportunities of gloating diabolically over every twitch on the face of a man whom, at one and the same time, she loathed and loved. She wanted to see him flinch under the blow and thus feel assured that her stiletto-point had gone well and truly home.

The presiding notary was in readiness at the table, armed with all needful documents and the fateful wooden hammer. His clerk now read out the conditions of sale, with detailed particulars of the property offered, to an audience comprising about twenty persons, for the most part attracted by mere motives of curiosity, because it was matter of common knowledge that the Harmmsters intended to buy, and that no one in the Vale of Api had either the desire or the means to oppose them.

All was hushed and still when the clerk had done. It was something like the silence of seconds and onlookers while swords are being measured before a duel to the death.

"The reserve price—set upon the Bois Roux —the property of Monsieur Etienne—mayor of the Vale of Api—" began the auction-room

apparitor, in the sing-song tone of all the usher tribe—"is twenty thousand francs. Any buyers—here present in this room?"

"Yes," said Nathan Harmmster. "I bid the reserve price, twenty thousand francs."

The notary smiled a very frosty smile, for Etienne, who had not cared to turn up at the sale, had always spoken of thirty thousand francs as the surest of certainties.

"Any advance on twenty thousand francs?" asked the man of law uneasily.

"Twenty thousand one hundred," replied a determined voice.

Alberta did not need to turn her eyes in the direction whence it came. She knew the grave, deep tones too well. How they thrilled her! The cool assurance on which she had set store abandoned her at once. Indeed, sooth to say, she felt her temper getting too much for her. To prevent the threatened outburst she pressed both hands on her panting breast. But prolonged self-control was entirely out of the question. Before her father could put in a word she had shouted:

"Thirty thousand francs!"

It sounded like the jubilant yelp of some female savage clubbing at the head of a prostrate foe.

But Nathan Harmmster did not like this

kind of thing at all. It seemed to him that for a Jewess his daughter must suddenly have lost her wits. It was the wildest of wild procedures to make a nine thousand nine hundred franc advance on a beggarly hundred franc rise. His daughter's bid was downright idiotic, and he told her so in a fairly subdued tone of voice.

"What do you expect?" she retorted in a higher key. "That man there wants to spoil all my plans! Oh, you don't know things—you don't understand how a woman can hate! I hate that man from the bottom of my heart with a maddening, deadly hatred! He is your enemy and—I hate him."

"Don't speak so loud—he may hear you."

"I don't care if he does. I mean to trample on him in this room to-day until he'll be glad to shriek and scream out to me for mercy."

However, there was little enough of the crushed and agonized supplicant in the young man's attitude while these pleasant intentions were being announced in a savage whisper. He remained standing where he was in front of the notary, attentive and calmly expectant, until the excited buzz of words had ceased and silence once more reigned. Then he raised Alberta's bid precisely as he had raised her father's.

"Thirty thousand *one* hundred francs," he said.

These small advances of a hundred francs apiece were highly characteristic. They betrayed the man of sense and moderation—the determined athlete, too, who at the outset of a race is well aware that self-control spells staying-power. But a hundred francs was the minimum advance permissible, and each repetition of it, therefore, struck Alberta Harmmster as beggarly and made her draw down her full lips in smiles of scorn. Jacques was not observing her. Her father, however, had come to the conclusion ere this that Alberta was the merest bag of nerves at present. After his fashion he told her as much in a whisper, motioning her aside with his arm as he spoke.

"Let me look after this business," he said. "You are quite unstrung."

She felt that he was right, and obeyed. Getting up from her seat, she stood at the side of the room with her back to the wall, prodding at the tips of her shoes with the point of her parasol, while irritably watching the next phases of the duel. These proved sufficiently exciting.

"Thirty thousand five hundred francs," said Nathan in squeaky, nasal tones, that were the

tones, however, of a level-headed man who knew his business.

"Thirty thousand six hundred francs," replied Jacques in his steadier monotone.

"Thirty-five thousand francs!"

"Thirty-five thousand one hundred francs."

"Thirty-eight thousand francs!"

"Thirty-eight thousand one hundred francs."

"Say forty thousand, fifty thousand!" called Alberta to her father hysterically.

"Let me alone. Thirty-nine thousand francs!"

"Thirty-nine thousand one hundred francs."

"Forty thousand francs!"

"Forty thousand one hundred francs."

"Fifty thousand francs!" Alberta shouted, brandishing her parasol like one distraught.

But at this juncture stout Victor rushed into the firing line, bellowing his objections from the business point of view.

"Look here," he exclaimed to Nathan. "I'm your partner, you must recollect, and I'm simply not going to let you and Alberta there think you can shove me aside like a cherry-stone and go fooling about with thousand-franc notes as if they grew thick in every back-yard down at the works. I reckon you didn't bring me here, did you, just to have me sit down like a log while that girl wreaks her spite

at my expense? No fear, Nathan, my boy! I don't care two straws about the Bois Roux, for my own part, and what is more, speaking as your partner, I put my veto, my *absolute* veto, on any higher bid. Good heavens, man, I'm not the fellow to sit here and be killed right out of hand to satisfy a woman's caprice! Let her have a new gown, if she likes, at any figure she fancies, but fifty thousand francs to serve as a pretext for a hundred thousand more, and all to build a branch-house on top of an utterly impossible site—why, it's downwright midsummer madness! Oh, you heard what I said, Alberta? Yes, you ought to be put in a straight-jacket!"

"I am buying with my own money," said the girl stubbornly.

"Excuse me," retorted Victor, "your settlement is not at your disposal till you are of age."

"I want the Bois Roux!" cried Alberta, beside herself with rage. "I have never wanted for anything in my life till now—I *will* have the Bois Roux—I *must* have it! My dowry to any one here present who will lend me fifty thousand francs!"

"Forty thousand one hundred francs," reiterated Jacques. His face was set and white.

"Fifty thousand!" shrieked Alberta. "I bid fifty thousand francs!"

Losing patience entirely, her father tried to clap his hand over her mouth. But she wriggled her head aside and continued to scream her bid anew. Nathan Harmmster then addressed himself to the notary.

"I beg you to take notice, sir," he said, "that my daughter is under age, and that both my brother and myself decline absolutely to make ourselves responsible for any obligations Mademoiselle may incur in the present unpleasant circumstances."

This was too much for Alberta. Betrayed, as she considered it, most certainly abandoned by her only friends in the encounter she had meant to be a decisive combat—deserted in an hour of battle which she had long prepared and long esteemed beforehand an hour of absolute triumph (else why had she donned so sumptuous a toilette?), what wonder she collapsed on the bench behind her and sat there crouching in a fit of wrathful tears? Meanwhile all eyes were fixed on the thin candle which it is customary to light in French provincial auction-rooms to measure the legal delay of a few minutes between the offer of the highest bid and the final fall of the hammer. The taper—it was little better—burned steadily at first, and then more rapidly. The flame was almost eagerly watched as in the course

of a few minutes it took to rising ar[ny boy! I
guttering and flickering and fla[pis Roux,
though—like Alberta herself—it we[eaking as
worst and wickedest of impotent bad [*ute* veto,
and spluttering "no surrender" to the l[an, I'm

"Forty thousand one hundred fr[ht out
echoed the notary, with a final glance ar[t her
the room. "Make up your minds, gentlen[he
the candle is going out. A nice little wood[a
splendid situation—now, then, gentlemen, le[
us decide while there is still a moment to spare.
Forty thousand one hundred francs are bid.
Any advance on that figure, gentlemen? No?
Going at forty thousand one hundred francs—
going—going—*gone!* The Bois Roux is here-
by sold to M. de la Ferlandière."

Nearly all those present heaved sighs of re-
lief. One elderly man, a bowed and weather-
beaten old figure who for years had been a
gamekeeper in the spinneys which Jacques had
saved, came forward and silently grasped him
by the hand.

Jacques had come alone, but he was provided
with quite a small escort of Brésolettes people
when he made his way to the inn where he had
stabled his mare. These well-meaning folk
had been made to feel that a man was still left
in their midst both able and willing to with-
stand the new arrivals, and they therefore tes-

Losing ed their admiration and gratitude in a dumb clap his h t of way by gathering around and looking gled her while he saw to his girths in front of the her bid able-yard. But Alberta and the Harmm- dressed ers were allowed to make their start for the "I b ale unnoticed, or rather they set off amid a my d silence that had in it more of ironic significance brot than of respect. Inside the smartly decorated our vehicle there was silence, too, but a very great deal of hard thinking. Not until they had reached Frilleux did Victor make up his mind to say the first word.

"Why," he muttered to his brother, "I thought our worthy friend, the Gaulish chief, hadn't got a red cent to his name?"

"He may be poverty-stricken," interposed Alberta, "but he is a well-plucked one, for all that, whereas *you*—you are a coward! You have got a cash-box in place of a heart, and all you are good for is to hamper a wretched woman when she is fighting her battles. Oh, you coward, you coward——"

"Now, then, be calm," said her father, who hated nothing so much as a scene.

"So I am to be calm!" the girl sneered. "Oh, don't you make any mistake about it—I *shall* be calm, a good deal calmer than I think you'll like. From this day out you can look after your business yourselves. You won't get any

help from me, do you understand? Confound your factories, and confound your miserable money, too, since you wouldn't let me have any of it at the one moment of my life when I needed it the most!"

CHAPTER XV

THE sale had not taken up very much time, so that it was barely eleven o'clock when Jacques was galloping back along the last stretches of the homeward road. He was in a thoughtful mood, for all his speed. Hitherto he had simply known that the manufacturers disliked him, and this knowledge had left his strong, quiet nature completely unruffled. But he had never suspected until to-day the existence of such depths of bitter rancor in the Harmmster girl's soul. He knew her henceforth for a woman quite capable of anything. Already he found himself wondering what on earth she was going to do next in the way of reprisals for this one single defeat—a defeat, by the way, that would tax his resources to the utmost.

Departing for once from his usual custom of riding right down to where the two roads met before the Abbaye, whenever he wanted to get out of one of them into the other, Jacques

"'Going at forty thousand one hundred francs . . . The Bois Roux is sold to M. de la Ferlandière.'"—*Page* 334

dismounted at the end of the field-path called the Tuquet, which we have previously mentioned, and proceeded to make his way on foot across the cornfields to the La Ferlandière highway. It was not so much that he purposed sparing his mount the few hundred yards of pebbly uphill road to the Abbaye, but that in his present mood he simply dreaded the chances of a meeting with Odile. He felt sorely shaken this morning. He was not himself for the time being, and could not but be aware that his financial and other worries must be pretty discernible to the gaze of any sympathetic observer. And so, in order to save Odile some needless pain, he led his mare by the bridle along the footpath through the corn, and even held the animal's head low between the high ridges of wheat so as to prevent any possibility of recognition from the Abbaye windows at long range—for Odile knew all his saddle-horses, and was especially friendly with Milly, the beautiful creature he had brought out this morning. With him also was Odile's spaniel, Djinn, a great favorite with the master of La Ferlandière.

After an all but stealthy advance in this wise through the luxuriant harvest, with the ripe ears brushing his face and whispering the true "song of the golden sheaves" around him,

Jacques emerged without incident upon the La Ferlandière road. There he remounted and ambled homeward in the narrowing shade of the wayside poplars. His pace was easier; not so his mind.

The Bois Roux, he reflected, was now his own. There had been a sudden call to arms that morning, and he had proved—yes, he had proved the best man—apparently. Apparently, because, to put it quite bluntly, he simply had not got the money that was wanted. Nor did he very well know where he was going to get it, within twenty-four hours, in the present encumbered condition of his affairs. Forty thousand francs was a good round sum, and it had given pause to even those wealthy manufacturers. Now Jacques was no more than a plain country squire, and on carefully going over his accounts first thing that morning, before starting on the journey to Brésolettes, he had discovered that it was doubtful if he could spare even so much as twenty thousand francs for the purchase of the Bois Roux without disclosing to all and sundry the real weakness of his position. If he were obliged to sell up any of his land at short notice he would infallibly lose that local prestige which was so vitally necessary if he meant to prolong the struggle and inspire his antagonists with a wholesome

feeling that he was ready for their next assault. It had come to this, then, that he, Jacques, Comte de la Ferlandière, a gentleman by birth, breeding, and instinct, had purchased property for which he could not pay!

None the less, he felt that he had acted rightly. What he had done was simply what *had* to be done. As he rode along he surveyed, at a bend in the road, the vast expanse of the Abbaye and La Ferlandière estates, spread out before him like an open fan, symmetrically jewelled (to continue the comparison) by the two fine manor-houses, and adorned with a silver scarf at the handle by the winding waters of the river Jouine. Assuredly, thought Jacques, the erection of evil-smelling tanneries in such wise that they would dominate and overwhelm this radiant landscape was something not to be endured. Undoubtedly he had done right in obeying a heartfelt impulse. Supposing he had silenced his feelings—supposing he had called on Odile after returning from the sale and said to her: "Alberta Harmmster is going to settle down here, within five hundred yards of your gates, and it is all over with the peace and quiet of our wooing and our wedded life!" If this had been his message, what a frightened look would have come into the girl's eyes! Jacques could rehearse the

scene as plainly as though it had just taken place. He could feel Odile's gaze upon him, and hear her say very trustfully: "So you were not there, then, dear?" His only reply could be, "Oh, yes, I was." "Then why did you let them have their way?" There would be no possible answer to that—no answer, at any rate, that Odile could understand.

However, hard facts must now be faced. The crisis was one demanding a seriously heavy cash payment at very short notice, and no amount of land—considered in itself, and abstracting from all questions of sale and mortgage—could enable Jacques to win out in twenty-four hours. Mother Earth is a strong and teeming nurse, with something in her of God's own calm might, but she counts upon our faith and trust. She gives us daily bread, but it is *daily*—from day to day—and she is most loth to lend herself to the arts of the gambler even when, as in the present case, speculation has been forced upon one by hard dint of circumstances. And so the young man grew moodier and moodier the nearer he drew to his home, where everything seemed to be slumbering in the heat, from the silent song-birds in the trees overhead and the drowsy cattle in the meadows beyond to the invisible human inhabitants of the house itself.

Some way out of the difficulty must be found—and an honorable way, too, one that should not give these Jews the chance to laugh at him. Above all, his opponents must never be given opportunity to scoff and exult the more loudly because at first they had seemed—and only *seemed*—to undergo defeat. Ah, if Etienne had never made shipwreck of his simple faith, what plain and easy sailing it would all have been! Ten thousand francs a year for just four years to come, and the Bois Roux could have been his without perceptible strain on his resources. But Etienne must now be counted with as a pitiless creditor, sure to exact payment on the nail, and to the uttermost farthing, like the resentful and rapacious boor he had latterly become.

Jacques shrank from the idea of borrowing. He had never applied anywhere for a loan in all his life, and the notion of beginning now was repugnant to all his feelings and traditions as a man of family. After all, he reflected, it need not come to *that* while there still remained superfluities and comforts in his large and generous way of living, which might readily be cut down, with the least good-will in the world. And then an idea came into his mind and took root there, and speedily grew, not without much pain in the process. An observer might

have gathered good evidence of this from the way the young rider suddenly drew rein and dallied on the road. He even turned the mare's head and made her pace up and down a short stretch of the highway in order to prolong his self-communing and inner conflict before venturing down the avenue and so home. The animal resented her master's fit of the fidgets and began to grow restive herself, tossing her pretty head with no small measure of indignation, as though saying, "Do please make up your mind one way or the other and let me get back to my stable."

Suddenly a boyish voice broke in on the noontide calm and dispelled for the nonce the musings that were worrying both mare and man.

"Good day, Monsieur Jacques," said the voice.

"Good day, little man," replied Jacques.

And as he spoke he waved his hand good-humoredly—almost gratefully, even—in the direction of the speaker.

It was a tiny shepherd-boy, one Furet by name. Outside his short school hours he was employed at La Ferlandière, and was hastening back thither at this moment. Emerging from between the hedgerows of a side-path through the meadows, he made a quaint little

figure, with his tousled hair and dusty bare feet, the more especially that he was carrying his wooden shoes in either hand.

"Where are you bound for now?" queried Jacques.

"I am going to see if Monsieur Potain has any errands for the Vale, Monsieur Jacques."

The reply had the unforeseen effect of peremptorily closuring all Jacques' inward doubts and debates. It being true that nothing in this world occurs quite wholly by accident, he practically regarded the opportune arrival of a convenient and trusty messenger as something providential.

"Wait one moment," he said to the little lad. "I want you to take a note for me."

With that he steadied the mare, produced his pocket-book, and tore out a spare leaf on which to scribble a message in pencil. But the flies were troublesome, and the mare kept tossing her head. Dismounting, therefore, and giving the rein to Furet, he went and found a steadier seat on the kilometer stone, beneath the scant shadow of the wayside poplars.

And this is what he wrote:

"LITTLE SISTER,

"I am leaving you to lunch all alone this morning. I shall beg my bread and salt from M. de Chailuy. Try not to be too bored—I shall be back about four. I am sending this line by Furet, who will also bring back Djinn with him.

"With a kiss, little Jeanne, from JACQUES."

"There, now," said the Squire, as he folded the page and slipped it into an envelope. "Are you an intelligent boy, little Furet?"

The lad's russet-brown eyes brightened up at the question.

"Oh, yes, Monsieur Jacques," he replied, with the fine self-confidence of his years, "I am the third boy at school!"

"Out of how many?"

"Out of seven."

"Splendid!" cried Jacques. "Now, then, after that, I am sure you can run this errand well for me. Do you know Mademoiselle Jeanne?"

"Oh, yes, Monsieur Jacques."

"Very well. Before you run on to Monsieur Potain, go up to the house and leave word in the kitchen for me that I want this note to be taken up to Mademoiselle at once."

"I shall go up with it myself!" exclaimed Furet, who was a determined small person, and felt able to act for himself without help from any one.

"No," corrected Jacques. "Just hand this in at the kitchen door—I prefer it that way, do you understand?"

"Yes, Monsieur Jacques."

"And I want you to get hold of Djinn and take him back with you to La Ferlandière."

"Yes, Monsieur Jacques."

"And then you must tell the cook to give you a huge slice of bread and lard."

"Yes, Monsieur Jacques."

"That is all. Off with you, now."

"Au revoir, Monsieur Jacques."

"Au revoir," replied the Squire, remounting his mare and guiding her into a field-path skirting the rear of the farm-yard on the left. He was soon galloping hard in the direction of the château where dwelt his friend, De Chailuy.

The sun now neared the zenith. Horse and man sped onward in the noonday blaze, the creaking leathers and jingling curb-chains giving out the crisp, set rhythm that is music to a rider's ear. Many a covey of indignantly vocal song-birds arose at their approach and flew away in affright from fields where they had hoped to spend a drowsy nooning, amid the shelter of wheat, oats, and rye. The entire world around was redolent of that rich fragrance of harvest which has made glad the hearts of men since remote patriarchal days, when Holy Writ commended the "sweet smell of the full field." As far as the eye could reach, over fields and meadow and forest, the whole visible earth was comparable to a great mystic censer, exhaling countless balsamic odors in

God's great temple of Nature, overroofed by the illimitable blue.

On a sudden Jacques turned in the saddle, but without slackening speed, to ascertain the cause of certain curious sounds behind him. There was much rustling and ripping of cornstalks, with the muffled thud of quick feet, as though some wild creature—perhaps a hare, or even one of the larger vermin—were tearing through the field. Presently, with much swaying and cleavage of the crop, there came bolting out on the path behind him the ungainly figure of a highly excited spaniel. It was Djinn! Quite manifestly he was not one to part with a friend so readily as Jacques had deemed. His mouth was gaping, his tongue lolled out, and his ears were laid well back, but altogether he appeared insanely delighted with the joy of running himself off his feet, right through a cornfield, under the mid-day rays of a broiling sun. Far down the distant road Jacques caught a glimpse of Furet, diminished to the merest speck of perturbed humanity, uplifting both hands in the quaintest posture of dismay.

The incident was absurd enough, in all conscience, and at another season Jacques might have laughed heartily. As it was he remained as sober as a judge, and even seemed to be

taking Djinn into his confidence by the way he greeted him:

"Good dog!" he said sadly. "Yes, it *is* hard lines, is it not?"

The Comte de Chailuy was one of Jacques' oldest friends. Their families had been intimate for upward of a hundred years. Like two centennial oaks in the forest hard by, their houses had grown and flourished side by side for generations, in exceeding peace and enduring amity. The present De Chailuy, like Jacques himself, was a veritable son of the soil, a man of lusty health and genial temperament. Since his wife's death he had developed certain oddities of manner, as is not uncommon among those who live much by themselves, but this did not dim in the least the luster of his true old-world courtesy. Even when making the round of his pastures, with his coat-tails flying in the breeze, and sporting a huge white felt sombrero and gold-knobbed cane, one found him somehow incomplete without the rapier worn by gentlemen of his class in the reign of Louis XIV. Jacques met him often, for the pair of them were mighty hunters before the Lord. However, Jacques' pack of hounds was an abiding source of despair to his whimsical friend, because, as the latter quite freely con-

fessed, it was far and away, and indeed incomparably better than his own. Full oft had he tempted Jacques with alluring financial proposals—one of which we have mentioned above. Jacques had laughed and stood firm. As a result, throughout a region as big as many an English shire, Jacques' hounds ranked first and the rest were nowhere—not even M. de Chailuy's fairly serviceable pack.

From earliest boyhood Jacques had always received the kindest and most cordial of welcomes in his elder friend's home, especially at meal-times. In his turn, M. de Chailuy possessed and used the freest run of La Ferlandière, and his occasional unceremonious calls in quest of lunch or dinner were a source of great joy to Jacques and his sister.

The château of the De Chailuys was then, and still remains, a splendid example of its class. Built upon lines suggesting a perfect Fontainebleau in miniature, it stands on high ground in a superbly wooded park, diversified here and there with sheets of ornamental water, the abode of huge and venerable carp. Everything in the place, from these patriarchal fish to the century-old trees whose branches are mirrored in the lake, speaks mutely of a France that is now no more. Unlike La Ferlandière, nestling down in its hollow, the house crowns a

considerable eminence, a good view of which can be obtained from One-Acre Meadow a mile and a half away. In the height of summer, however, the château is so heavily curtained by the dense foliage of the great trees standing all about it as to be practically invisible except to observers who have emerged from the avenue and taken their stand on the terrace itself.

The clock in the courtyard had just chimed the quarter past noon when Jacques and his mare came hot-foot on the scene. M. de Chailuy had already sat down to lunch in a big breakfast-room whose windows opened on the lawn. Opposite him sat his niece, Marie—whom he usually called "Mimie"—a vivacious, small person in short frocks, not yet emancipated from the school-room. The footman waiting at table was first to catch the sound of hoofs without, and stole a glance through the windows, which stood slightly ajar on account of the heat.

"Who is it?" asked his master.

"Monsieur le Comte de la Ferlandière," said the man.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed M. de Chailuy, getting up forthwith and flinging the nearest window wide. Then he bawled to Jacques at the top of his big, jolly voice, before the

unexpected visitor had had time to look around and catch sight of him.

"Hello, dear boy!" he cried. "What a delightful surprise! What lucky wind has blown you hither?"

"Well," replied Jacques, advancing across the lawn and shaking hands through the open window, "it is hardly mere luck or chance. I have come on purpose to ask you to give me some lunch—and for other reasons. Are you alone?"

"Yes—or rather no. I have Mimie with me; but then you and Mimie are old friends."

"Of course we are!" exclaimed the young person referred to, getting up from her seat and coming forward to the window. As she did so her pretty gold curls contrived to enmesh a sunbeam that seemed to be lurking there on purpose. "Of course we are old friends! How do you do, Monsieur Jacques?"

"How do you do, Mimie? By-the-by, my dear fellow, do let me run upstairs to your room for a bit of a rubdown. I have been out since this morning, and the roads are fearfully dusty."

"By all means. There will be just time to lay a place for you while you are gone."

Jacques went upstairs, and the friendly Mimie ran after him to press upon his notice

some eau de Cologne of her own, that was ever so much better, she declared, than that which he would find on her uncle's dressing-table. A small matter this, in itself, but a great thing in its way to Jacques just then, as indicative of the cordial and homelike welcome he was receiving. The business he had come about was lying heavy on his heart, and he needed all the kindness that was going.

At table he endeavored to be cheerful, and even gay, out of respect to his friends and also to give the servants nothing of consequence to talk about. He was not himself, however, and was so unaccustomed, withal, to playing a part that M. de Chailuy soon guessed there was something wrong under all this apparent breeziness of manner. And so, like the good fellow he was, he kept the conversation going along safe and humdrum lines. There was the inevitable word about the crops, now suffering badly from heat and drought, and then Jacques detailed his plans for the autumn; how he proposed to enlarge the pond; doubted whether he would sow beetroot again in the low-lying fields by the Jouine—and so on and so forth. M. de Chailuy made safe replies, and at the same time contrived that his guest should be well and rapidly fed. The latter was the more readily achieved that Jacques took neither

coffee nor liquors, and was even a non-smoker. Consequently, within less than half an hour of his arrival the meal was ended and M. de Chailuy got up and proposed a walk to the apiary, for the inspection of his latest hives. Mimie, he suggested very diplomatically, might ply her camera while the sun still shone, outside the danger zone—for the little lady's dread of bees was rather overwhelming.

"Whatever you do," said Jacques to her, "don't let the sun set fire to the films!"

It was his feeble last effort at make-believe, and his face grew graver the moment her back was turned.

"If you have no objections," he said to his host, after a few paces down the long, shady walk, "I would like to put off seeing your hives till some other day."

"As you please," said M. de Chailuy good-naturedly, and pulling out his cigar-case as he spoke. "Are you still a non-smoker?"

"Yes," said Jacques, apologetically waving aside the proffered Havanas.

"You have no vices, then?"

"Oh, yes, I have!"

"I would very much like to be told what they are, then," said the elder man incredulously, but with a note of puzzlement all the same.

"I am too fond of land."

"Why, that is the superbest of vices, my dear boy!"

"It is also one of the costliest."

"For the time being, perhaps, but not in the long run, surely. By-the-by, some one was telling me that you have been buying up whatever land was going in the Vale of Api."

"It would have been the sheerest madness not to take the chance. Just think of it now. We have reached the turning of the ways, and agriculture in these parts seems threatened with nothing short of extinction. All the crofters and cotters are selling up their holdings and becoming factory hands. The very utmost the more provident among them are doing is to keep a little patch as a kitchen-garden, to raise what vegetables they need for their own use. The majority of them have moved right away from the old homesteads and have gone to live in the town. That is not the worst. The farmers, especially the smaller men, are being compelled to sell up in their turn, because they can no longer find laborers to hire. As things are now, land is worthless from a commercial point of view. For all that, I have just bought the Bois Roux for 40,000 francs."

"Forty thousand francs!" ejaculated M. de

Chailuy with a start. "Why, the place isn't worth ten thousand."

"I daresay you are right."

"I am sure I am right!"

"Only, it simply *had* to be bought. The result is that for the first time in my life I have made a purchase that I can not pay for. I regard you as a friend indeed or I would not be coming here and telling you all this. It is really what has brought me here to-day."

"I thought you looked anxious about something," replied M. de Chailuy frankly. "But you have come to the right house, my dear fellow, for I *am* your friend indeed, as you say, and—if you will permit me—I will be your friend in need. Now, then, let us settle this matter and get it off our minds at once. You want me to lend you money. How much? Twenty thousand? Thirty thousand? My rents have just come in from the tenants, and I was going over to Saint-Quentin next week to bank them. You will save me the journey. Come, now, you have dropped in just at the right time—like salt fish in Lent, as they say."

"Thank you—thank you ever so much," replied Jacques. "But I don't exactly want to borrow money, really."

"Never mind, I want to offer you the loan of it, and welcome. Besides," continued M. de

Chailuy, following out some train of thought of his own, "may I put just one question—a genuinely friendly question?"

"As many as you please."

"Well, then, have at you. Why is it that you are buying up all and sundry pieces of ground the moment they come into the market, instead of confining yourself to purchases like the Bois Roux and other properties immediately adjoining and surrounding the Abbaye and your own place?"

"I will tell you. For these two years past I have been watching the movements of these factory people—in fact, I may say I have studied their programme pretty closely, without letting any one be the wiser for it. I suppose I *did* make a mistake in leaving out of count the games this Harmmster girl has been playing; if so, I am paying for it now. But, on the other hand, I follow the *Railway Times* most carefully, and have also procured from the Town Council offices the fullest available information concerning the business transactions, or, more bluntly speaking, the outrageous speculations of these factory people. My dear fellow, the whole thing is the wildest of wild romances. It makes one dizzy to read it. The story is every bit as fantastic in its way as a Hoffmann fairy-tale. Let these Jews

be as rich as you like, I say they simply can not afford to go on building a ring of factories right around this whole region, as they seem to be bent on doing. Why, Rothschild himself would think twice before running up four such enormous factories as theirs in less than two years! It almost looks as if some evil genius were positively driving the Harmmsters headlong to destruction. It is not so much that I feel this in my bones, as people say, but I have a reasoned conviction, based on facts, that the prosperity of these factories is apparent only. It is the merest tinsel lure, like a gaudy Mayfly with an angler's hook in it, to drag the whole place into a general state of degradation—one that will cost us all dear, too, and bring about certain results I want to be able to checkmate when the time has come."

"Will you be able?"

"Where there is a will there is a way. I want to get ready for the inevitable big smash, so that when the factories go by the board all the outsiders they have brought into the place will have to clear out, too. I would not like one such trespasser to find one single piece of ground hereabouts where he could settle down and strike fresh root."

"That will be a difficult matter to prevent."

"I suppose it will, in the Vale of Api itself.

But it will be all right in the entire district surrounding the Abbaye and my own place—I mean Fumeçon and the Neigerie. There I have bought everything up, and when the time comes I can sell to the right kind of purchasers only, and even from them I shall exact guarantees. I would like to think that I have a sort of mission to protect the land—to safeguard it against profanation, and to hand it over to worthy stewards only."

"That is all very fine, but, as you have said yourself, it comes most ruinously expensive."

"Precisely. I am at the end of my resources just now."

"That being so, in what way would you like me to serve you?" reiterated M. de Chailuy. "Surely you came to borrow something, did you not?"

"Yes—or rather no."

"I fail to understand."

"I must out with it, then," said Jacques. And he looked his friend full in the face and brought out his words with some effort. "The fact is—I would like to sell you my—my hounds—the whole pack."

M. de Chailuy halted dead and looked at him in surprise.

"Sell me your pack!" he exclaimed with bewilderment in his eyes and tones. "Why, it is

only a few months since you declined my offer of a thousand francs apiece for some of them."

"True. But all the same, I not only do not refuse such an offer now, but I ask you to renew it."

"Well, no, my dear boy," said M. de Chailuy on reflection, and with almost a paternal note in his voice. "You simply must not be allowed to part with your pack like that. Pray *do* allow me, in a neighborly way, to lend you whatever money you require. It is by far the simplest course; nobody need know anything whatever about it, and it will give me the greatest possible pleasure."

"I have never borrowed money, and I confess it would give me pain to do so now. Besides, the kind loan you suggest would be—well, a sort of ready-made road out of the difficulty, would it not? Whereas I think it only right and proper that I should be made to suffer something for the cause. The people about here know what a keen sportsman I am, and when they see me parting with my hounds to make money out of them for the sake of the land, they may get it into their heads that the land has something sacred in it, and deserves a little self-sacrifice when need arises."

"Ah, well," Jacques concluded in a somewhat abrupter tone, as though unwilling to

pursue these musings further, "I take it you still have a fancy for my pack?"

"The deuce!" cried his outspoken friend. "I should think I have! I would be very hard to please if I hadn't. It is one of the finest packs in all France."

"You made me an offer of a thousand francs apiece for some. Do you stand by that still?"

"Most certainly."

"And how much would you think a fair price for the whole pack?"

"I leave that to you."

"No, fix your own price."

Thereupon there ensued a curious friendly wrangle between the two, not without its ennobling side, for each was endeavoring to accommodate the other, not to "best" him. Finally, M. de Chailuy cut the discussion short by declaring roundly that he would pay thirty-five thousand francs for the pack as it stood, "not a halfpenny less."

"I accept," said Jacques simply. "It is the figure I would have quoted myself if I were in your place."

"And what is more," said the jovial purchaser, "you must retain the use and custody of your hounds as long as you please."

"No, thanks, that would never do," returned Jacques, and so quickly that it almost seemed

as though he had fears for the strength of his own resolve. "Once the thing is decided upon, the sooner it is over the better."

"Have it your own way, then, my dear fellow," said his friend.

"Can you put them up this afternoon?"

"You—you don't mean that!"

"Have you kennel-room?"

"Well—yes, I have, since you are so keen about it."

"All right. Thanks very much. I must be off now."

Mimie was sent for, because Jacques was unwilling to leave without bidding her good-by, and glancing with what interest he could command at a few of her latest negatives. Then shaking hands with his host, he sprang into the saddle and rode away once more.

* * * * *

His homeward ride, under the torrid sun of early afternoon, lay along the more or less sheltered road by the fringe of the Frières woods. Even there the whole neighborhood seemed changing. Timber was being cut down right and left, and so ruthlessly withal that even certain familiar old trees, which had marked the site of rural festivities time out of mind, were being felled with what appeared indecent haste. Even the old-fashioned dairy-

farm at Voyot had undergone a species of industrial transformation. Its herds of red kine were no longer to be seen in the fields leading on to One-Acre Meadow. Jacques sorely missed the sight of them sitting, as had been their wont, in the shade of the apple-trees, placidly chewing the cud. The once rich pastures had been plowed up, trenched, and planted as far as the eye could reach with unending rows of beetroot intended for the sugar mills. Jacques could not help recalling with something like a sigh the not distant days when he and his friends could plan amicable invasions of the venerable kitchen at Voyot, with its cheery hearth and brightly twinkling wealth of copper utensils—invasions that were sure to be rewarded with plentiful draughts of new milk fresh from the cow.

"Everything is passing," thought he. "Everything is passing, or rather rushing onward. But the further a river gets away from its source in some calm upland dell, the darker and grimier it becomes—and the narrower, too, in the present artificial foreshortening of the world's horizons. The whole turbid stream will never really broaden until all at once it disembogues into some uncharted ocean. What a lucky thing yonder sky is so lofty! If it were lower, there would be limited liability engi-

neering companies to peg out their claims in the blue and sell them again at a profit to laundresses for drying grounds! Or they might unhitch the stars and get them mounted on scarf-pins for the personal adornment of people like Victor Harmmster!"

In such a mood as this the rider did well to make a detour and avoid the woods at Athiémont, where he had last hunted with Odile. The sight of these, and the thousand memories they were bound to evoke, would have been far too much for a lover in Jacques' present frame of mind. Taking another turning, therefore, he rode at ease through the whispering woodlands, seeking strength from the immense, unconscious, thrilling life pervading the green world all around him. Like many another whose dark hour has come when Nature is at her loveliest, his thoughts traveled onward—perhaps a trifle morbidly—to the day when his body should find rest beneath the kindly turf, while his soul sought out, in God's great pity, the *requiem æternam,* the abiding peace implored by the Church at the graveside of all her children, whose brows have been sealed with the sign of faith, and remain pillowed for a space in the valley of tears.

Absorbed in these and similar wistful fancies, Jacques reached his home once more, and had

a word with his sister before retiring within. Jeanne was comfortably seated in a punt on the lake, glancing at the pages of a book in the cool shadow of the willows, without paying much heed to her fishing-rod—which, indeed, still lay in joints beside her.

"Tell me, dear," said Jacques, "you were not too vexed with me for leaving you all alone at lunch to-day?"

"Not at all," she replied. "Did you find M. de Chailuy at home?"

"Yes. I say, Jeanne, would you mind doing me a favor?"

"Anything in reason."

"Well, go and tell them at the Abbaye to be good enough to come along here and dine to-night."

"Very well, but I thought we had settled it the other way about."

"I know, but I have changed my mind."

"All right," replied Jeanne resignedly, and without further comment. She felt dimly that Jacques had some plan in view concerning which he desired to keep her in the dark, but this bothered her very little, if at all. She was intelligent enough to be aware that engaged young people are apt to concoct the most remarkable mysteries all day long, the clumsy stitching of which need seldom deceive sympa-

thetic observers much longer than an hour at a time. She went and dressed, therefore, while her brother, with troubled eyes, kept pacing up and down the avenue. It was not long ere the victoria, with Jeanne aboard, was rolling past the white boundary-post and along the high road leading to the Abbaye. Jacques watched it out of sight, and then, feeling he had two clear hours before him, went straight to the farm. In the second of the two main yards were the kennels, filling a picturesque corner, fronted by a pavilion-like structure, allotted to the trainer's use. Jacques summoned the whipper-in in tones that were unwontedly abrupt.

"Pierre," he said, "I want you to obey such orders as I shall now give you without asking questions. To begin with, give the hounds an extra allowance of pudding."

While the under-huntsmen brought up long wooden troughs and filled them with the customary mixture, Jacques patted and stroked the dogs affectionately, especially the veterans, his tried old warriors, whose heads and breasts were one criss-cross pattern of honorable scars, the work of many a once menacing pair of tusks or antlers. At sight of these a lump threatened to rise in the young man's throat, but he gulped it down and called his favorites by name as cheerily as might be:

"How do, old Tenebro?" he cried in the coaxing tones the wisest of us use with our pet animals at times. "Here, Murmuro! Ravageot, come here, come here! Bellona! Pallas! Here, Marjorie, here! Ah, little Ravigotte, yes, I know she loves her master then. Yes—yes. Renfort! Brise-Tout! Messire! Marmouset! Matador! Vol-au-vent! Tintamarre! Tonnerre! Volante! Fanfare! Rapido! Stentor! Postillon! Romeo! Farandole!"

Each hound sprang forward as his name was called and thrust his way through the press in great eagerness to be made much of.

"Here, Trompillo, here!" went on Jacques. "Mephisto! Eamonot! Ratafouillo! Jupiter! Tayaut!"

Then he went around among the cubs, the hope of the pack, and the future pride—or so he had fondly deemed—of many a gallant hunt in seasons yet to come. They huddled around him on their absurdly big legs, too long and heavy for their bodies as yet, and made frantic efforts to mumble his hand. Failing that, they butted him with knowing, good-humored heads, as though nudging him, and impulsively demanding that he should not only be fond of them, but make far more fuss over them than of all of the rest combined.

From little to big, each hound had his his-

tory. The handsome pair yonder called Dick and Dicka had been Jacques' constant companions on many a solitary ride through the woods. But apart from, or rather side by side with, such individual memories stood out the more striking recollections of grand long days after boar or buck, with the whole pack in full cry, awakening the forest echoes with glorious music as they flashed along through the glades.

"Pierre," said Jacques suddenly, "couple these hounds for me, please."

The old man looked at him uncomprehendingly. It is quite possible that in the confusedly joyous din all around he had not caught the words. With some effort Jacques repeated them, and made his meaning still more clear.

"Yes," he added, "and take them over to the Comte de Chailuy's place this afternoon, and leave them there—all of them!"

The whipper-in certainly heard this time, but he could hardly believe his ears. He stared at his master like one in a dream. Never in his life before had he received such an order! To take the whole pack, at four o'clock on a summer's afternoon, to the house at Frières up the road? It was preposterous!

"Do what I tell you," persisted Jacques

almost angrily. He felt perversely annoyed that his old servant should not be able to read his thoughts without a single word of explanation.

"But, Monsieur le Comte," protested the man, "I—I don't understand."

"Surely I am talking plainly enough for anybody to understand. You will couple up these hounds—all of them, you understand?—and take them up the Frières road this afternoon to M. de Chailuy's house. The pack henceforth belongs to him and not to me. Is that plain enough for you?"

"You are joking, M. le Comte!"

Jacques frowned.

"Pierre!" he thundered, turning upon the huntsman almost savagely.

"Oh, you mean it, then," said the old man grimly. "Then you'll have to get some one else to do the job for you. I'm not the man for it, Monsieur. All these hounds have been bred and reared here, and whoever it is that takes them away from their proper home, it won't be me! No, thank you, not at my time of life. I should be far too much afraid that Monsieur's father might catch sight of me at the job. Ah, Monsieur's father! He wasn't a gentleman to——"

"Be silent, Pierre!"

"Perhaps," pursued the huntsman, with savage sarcasm, "perhaps you would like me to drown them for you? I wouldn't like the job, but I'd sooner it was that way. As for seeing them packed off to another man's house, just up the road here, and then running against them in the hunting-field some time when they were working for the Comte de Chailuy—*our* dogs, mind you—our own dogs, Monsieur—no, never! That wouldn't do for me at all. I should have to go right out of the district first. Why, it stands to reason, every man I'd be meeting on the road for weeks on end would be asking me questions I simply could not answer."

"Pierre," cried Jacques hoarsely, "you have no feeling."

"Begging *your* pardon, sir," said the other, "that's not the way it is. It is you who have no feeling!"

"I!"

"Yes, sir; if any man is heartless, it is yourself."

"Look here, now, Pierre, no matter what you say, you must know that this business costs me more than it does you. I am not obliged to give you my reasons for what I do—I should think you would take that for granted, and allow that my motives must be serious ones. Will

you or will you not obey me? Must I be obliged to couple these hounds myself?"

So saying, Jacques stepped aside from the pavilion and entered the kennel door. The huntsman followed him with dragging steps and began to get the leashes ready. But his fingers were all thumbs when it came to handling the straps and securing the hounds, and bite as he would at his gray mustache in a vain attempt to repress his grief, a big tear splashed on the back of his hand.

"Ah," he half sobbed, "here's a misery of misfortune, if you like! If any one had ever told me that the day would come when I would be turning these fine hounds out of doors with my own two hands, I'd swear—yes, I'd take my dying oath on it the thing was downright impossible. Yet here I am, going and doing it. Poor old Pierre, so this is your reward, is it, for five and thirty years' good service in one situation! Now you may clear out and die, my boy, for all *other* people care about you!"

The man seemed to be doing his best to carry out his orders, but the task was really much harder, on other grounds, than either Jacques or he had expected. At first the hounds were simply puzzled by the turn events had taken, and stood looking on with curious gaze at all these unwonted preparations. Then they began

to fidget, and finally grew thoroughly alarmed. Without one moment's warning they bolted to the far end of the kennel in a body, and there stood huddled together, as though scenting serious mischief in proceedings so different from their ordinary summer routine.

"You see, Monsieur le Comte," observed Pierre, "not one of them wants to leave you."

"We must use force, then," said Jacques very curtly.

"Easier said than done," muttered the huntsman.

Keeping his hands to himself—indeed, holding them behind his back, lest he should weaken in purpose, and stroke a dog's head here or there—Jacques walked to where the pack stood confronting him. They cowered against the wall, and looked up at him with piteous eyes, apparently full of the strangest forebodings of imminent and deadly peril.

"Get the whip, Pierre," said Jacques.

"Get it yourself," was the none too polite reply. "My heart is all of a tremble, and I don't care who knows it."

"Where is it, then?"

"I don't know," answered Pierre. He had perhaps as many as half a dozen dog-whips lying handy in his biscuit bin.

Jacques scanned the line of hunting-crops

hanging on the wall, but they were useless for his present purpose. Passing from the kennel to the coach-house adjoining, he at length found some new and unused dog-whips in the harness-room. Snatching one of these, he returned to the kennel with it, cracking the lash before him, and wearing a grim, set look Pierre had never noted on his face before.

"This way, you brutes!" he cried. "Here! Murmuro! Ravageot! Tenebro!

For the first time in their lives the three old hounds refused to answer their names at his call. The whole pack, indeed, squeezed back tighter and tighter away from him, till some of the hounds were literally piled on their companions' backs, and sprang thence for easier standing room to the surrounding shelves and benches, or flattened themselves against the brickwork on either side, with restless, burrowing motions, as though they wanted to dig holes and get away somewhere—anywhere—out of their master's sight.

Jacques was certainly not himself for the moment. He slashed right and left at the compact mass before him. The older dogs bore their punishment in silence, but there came a few whimpering cries from the poor cubs, when the stinging whip-lash reached them. However, this was seldom, as it chanced, for the stal-

warts of the pack were outmost and nearest, and so bore the brunt of all the heaviest blows. Three of them especially received more than their share—Murmuro and Ravageot, the sturdy couple who had all but pulled down the big boar on the day of the hunt, and Marjolaine, a magnificent pedigreed creature, bought in her puppyhood some years before by Odile, then a girl in her teens, and presented by her as a birthday gift to Jacques. This splendid creature took her undeserved thrashing with a dumb and almost pathetic bewilderment.

Indeed, there was something nearly human in the wondering gaze of all the sagacious eyes now turned on Jacques. They seemed downright sorry for him, and for an unhappiness which could make him—the best friend they had in the world—whip them hard without cause. It was as though the creatures mutely asked, "Why turn us adrift? What *have* we done to offend you?" Meanwhile the older hounds, and indeed the whole pack, did their canine utmost to make it quite clear that they had not the faintest intention of abandoning Jacques on account of a few stripes more or less. "If he doesn't know good friends when he sees them, *we* do." So each pair of intelligent eyes seemed to say.

This kind of thing could naturally not go on for ever. In his mood of exasperation and fixed resolve to have things over, Jacques tried another plan. Seizing Marjolaine by the nape of the neck in both hands, he lifted and flung her bodily through the kennel doorway, right into the yard without. But a pack of hounds is not a flock of sheep, and not one of the creatures moved. Indeed, before Jacques could very well see how it happened, the evicted Marjolaine had leaped airily back and resumed her old place confronting him. Once more—twice—and a third time—Jacques picked her up and threw her out. On each occasion she leaped back, either beside him or over him as the case might be, and recovered her stand with the rest.

There was nothing for it then. Jacques flung the whip aside and sat down on the nearest stool, practically a beaten man.

He realized that in certain things he was less iron-willed than he had deemed. His affection for these hounds was seemingly too much a part of himself to be lightly uprooted and cast aside. While he ruefully reflected thus, with his elbows on his knees and resting his head in his hands, his sorely tried friends took note of the lull in the storm and came quietly out from their corners and down from their shelves and benches.

Gathering round him, they seemed to study him a little; then they drew nearer and nuzzled against him with coaxing heads; they licked his hands, and altogether comported themselves in a very wise and considerate dog fashion, as though they made all allowances, without the faintest trace of ill-will. "Think of that, now!" they seemed to be saying. "Well, well, who would have thought it of you? To think of *your* doing a thing like that! You must have been asleep and dreaming! Yes, that's it. You fancied you were fighting some one in a dream! Suppose we forget all about it now, eh?"

Pierre was standing beside the hounds, with grave, reproachful eyes. He kept telling himself that he, too, would never have thought Monsieur capable of such a thing. Besides, he added, the Count must have known he was doing wrong or he would never have sent Mademoiselle right out of the way as he did.

Jacques rose and went off to the house without saying a word, and with a certain mistiness in his eyes which he wanted none to perceive. Regaining his room, he sat down and scribbled a line to M. de Chailuy, with fingers still quivering from the recent excitement and strain. It ran thus:

"DEAR FRIEND: You were right. It *is* too much for me. I shall not part with my hounds after all, because, unless I were to send them quite a hundred miles away from here, they would be always running back to me, and you would have the worst of a bad bargain. I now accept your first offer: so please lend me twenty thousand francs for one year.

"Believe me—now more than ever—

"Most affectionately yours,

"JACQUES."

Even when he had written this, Jacques was hardly willing to admit himself defeated. He kept turning and twiddling the sheet between his fingers before he could make up his mind to send it off. Was he right, he kept wondering, in thus speedily going back on his solid-seeming earlier resolve? Was his present course the result of mere weakness of will? Or was it simply and solely an effect of unalloyed goodness of heart? The most straightforward of us experience at times these singular uncertainties when arraigning some one of our most ordinary actions before the bar of conscience.

With the folded note-paper and envelope in his hand, Jacques made his way downstairs, and walked moodily up and down along the broad, secluded path by the banks of the fish-pond. Reviewing his conduct point by point, and with singular scrupulosity, he tried to get at the very bottom of his present apparent weakness. Slowly, and by degrees, the reasons for declining his friend's good offer, which he had alleged

while fresh from the emotions of the auction-room, came up in array before his mind. He found them flimsier by far than he would have thought possible an hour or so before. He now began to realize that, like the generality of men, he had been preparing to sacrifice at the shrine of self-esteem, and to immolate there his purely personal feelings, for the sake of appearing heroically strong-minded. In point of fact, the sale of his hounds would have defeated the very purpose that gave rise to it. To begin with, it would have proved most disagreeable to Odile herself. So marked a step could not long be concealed from her, and might look most uncommonly like making her pay dear for his handsome bridal gift of the Bois Roux. Besides, the La Ferlandière kennels were an especial glory, not only of his house, but of the whole rural life into which Odile had been born, and with which her whole existence was so intimately bound up. He was constrained to admit that becoming an ex-Master of Hounds at a price was one of the queerest imaginable ways of embarking on wedded life.

Then, again, there was public opinion to be considered. It was highly doubtful if his act of self-denial would be construed in the proper sense. The peasantry at large would probably see in it no more than an indication of weak-

ness, or they might even esteem it a serious omen of approaching ruin. Meantime, the Jews who owned the tanneries would certainly not fail to derive from the sale of their chief opponent's hounds a great inducement to renew hostilities, and at the earliest possible date.

Whereas, on the other side of the undoubted difficulty, M. de Chailuy was not merely an intimate personal friend, but a most notably reticent man. He would be the last in the world to let the public share his confidence concerning the part he was taking in the Bois Roux transaction. In virtue of these and similar considerations, Jacques came to the conclusion that, weighing one form of discomfort with another, it was perhaps far better for him to suffer in what concerned his personal dignity than in other, more vital respects.

Wherefore, sealing the envelope, he gave it to Firmin, his valet, with instructions to take it to Frières immediately. Yet even so, when the man had started on the errand, and Jacques had returned upstairs, he stood at the window watching the messenger making his way across the wheat-fields as though more than half minded to summon him back before he got out of earshot.

When Firmin's figure had finally disap-

peared behind the tall poplars on the Abbaye road, Jacques closed the window with a sigh.

"Ah, little Odile!" he said very softly. "You *will* be good to me, will you not? I know you will. I need it sorely, for truly, little one, I am having a very bad time for your sake."

CHAPTER XVI

JACQUES' troubles were by no means at an end. Unfortunately they were no more than beginning. Indeed, he was now only taking the first short stumbling steps on a long and grievous road. *"Wer will Thranen ernten,"* says the sorrowing German proverb, *"muss Liebe saen."* Would you garner tears? Then sow the seed of love. The young man was destined soon to realize in its entirety the bitter-sweet truth of the Rhineland adage.

For some little time past he had become vaguely aware of certain efforts on Odile's part, when they sat together and perhaps sketched out plans for the future, to prevent him from observing her features and general expression too closely. And yet otherwise her manner was as frank and open as ever.

What man so wise that he can read a maiden's heart? True, but then Odile was after all his affianced bride, and it seemed very strange that

she should appear to have something to conceal from a lover who hid nothing whatever from her. He knew of no cause why she should not yield him all her secrets, with the utmost confidence in his love. He could not fathom a certain pensiveness in her demeanor at times. He noted it especially when their eyes met, and it gave him the impression that Odile was inwardly pursuing some serious line of thought of her own from which he was completely debarred. And yet she seemed to be listening to whatever he was saying at the moment.

The plain truth of the matter was that Odile had the gentlest and most womanly of reasons for a policy of concealment and silence. She simply shrank from the keen pain that disclosure must inflict upon Jacques. She told herself sadly that nothing whatever is gained by meeting misfortunes half way, and that hope, while it lasts, is itself a sort of happiness.

Needless to say, this well-meant course of reticence and inaction was sooner or later bound to have an end. As time drifted on Odile braced her courage for the ordeal and resolved to take such decisive steps as were becoming each day more imperative. Hitherto the date of the wedding had been quite easily postponed a few times, for one or other of the countless excellent reasons that are bound to

crop up when it is a question of taking final vows, in either religion or the world. But Jacques had now so effectively disposed of all legal and business matters affecting the two estates, such as settlements, conveyances, titles and the like, that there really seemed no particular reason why Odile should not leave the Abbaye and become mistress of La Ferlandière at once, under the fostering care of a husband whose love was the greater for waiting so long.

But although she yearned for the wedding-day, she also could not think of it without dread. This was due to no shadow of alteration in her deep love for Jacques, nor were her tremors the outcome of mere girlish hesitancy, such as makes so many young people of her age and sex inclined to recoil from any mundane arrangement whatever, if it be so definitely settled that there is no getting out of it. She had more serious reasons for her dread. They could all be summed up in a single word —her health.

Those who live much together are the last to take note of very gradual changes, for better or worse, in each other's personal appearance. Jacques had grown quite accustomed to Odile's unnatural pallor, and the almost uncanny luster of her dark blue eyes. He

found nothing new in the translucency of her exquisite hands, or strange in the power the heavy braids of golden hair now seemed to possess, as though their weight drew back the slender neck and tilted up the flower-like face. Sooth to say, he had rather she were thus than otherwise. Very dear to his heart was his fair, unearthly dream-maiden, in whom all was as ethereal as though some clear, bright spirit had playfully enfolded itself in all but incorporeal human guise, very beauteous, but far too frail to hide the undying radiance from within.

Her lover's delight in her looks was far from being shared by Odile herself. When left alone, uncheered by the gaze of a pair of eyes that could sustain her and lend her energy, she felt drooping, like an unsupported trellis-plant, too frail to uphold the teeming life within it. At such hours she was wont to feel, without one moment's warning, a sudden, unreasoning, desperate dread of the years the future had yet in store.

Since the day of the boar-hunt, and the mischance of her collision with the overhanging branch, Odile's health had begun to run down steadily. Before that time, although never robust, her constitution had been fairly sound, but now the internal injuries, after remaining dormant for a while, had developed into a sort

of rallying ground for a whole host of ugly symptoms. Taken one by one, these last might, perhaps, have been of little account individually, especially if each had run its transient course and disappeared. But they had come to stay, and to stay collectively, worse luck, so that certain rather sinister complications arose. The outlook, therefore, seemed fraught with peril.

Odile said no word to living soul concerning the progress of her malady, not that she was deaf to its warnings—she was far too introspective and self-analytic for that—but because she had made up her mind to do the right and proper thing when the time had come, and, meanwhile, to inflict no anguish of long suspense upon those near and dear to her. She felt strong enough to keep all her worries to herself till the best or the worst could be definitely ascertained.

As is usual with nervous, highly strung natures, Odile's expression was never long the same. Even Jacques was wont to banter her lightly at times about her fast-fleeting moods of mind and heart, as mirrored in her face. But could he have seen her on certain days, stretched flat on a couch, with a blood-stained handkerchief beside her, almost gnawing her knuckles in wild efforts to repress her cough—

had he seen her then, and the look of sheer despair in her eyes, he would certainly no longer wonder, nor need to be told in words, why the poor child put off the wedding-day so often.

Yet, in spite of all, Odile clutched at every straw of hope, and made the bravest of struggles against a defeat which she knew full well would bring agonies of grief into her lover's life. There were days when she was the willing prey of alluring hopes—days when she fancied she was getting better without possible fear of a relapse. And there were other times when she felt equally sure that she was doomed, and must look for her happiness in the next world only. Her outlook varied like an April day, whose skies of limpid blue are checkered by driving rain-clouds, while ever and anon the mild airs of early spring are chilled and the first timid blossoms nipped in the bud by raw, cold, northerly winds.

Most painful as her situation had become, Odile surveyed it from no other standpoint than that of her lover's happiness. She considered she was consulting and prolonging his peace of mind by her present silence, although she was fully determined to speak out, whichever way it was, the moment she could speak with certainty. Until then she resolved to

spare every one near her the futile terrors of her own prolonged suspense.

And so a morning came when, after lengthy study of the difficulty under every possible aspect, Odile took train for Paris, "to do some shopping," she said, accompanied by one elderly female servant only. Never yet in her life had she made a journey to the capital in this wise.

It was an overpoweringly sultry August day. The intense glow of the broiling sun was reflected in hard, hot, blinding rays from the façades of every shop and warehouse Odile had to pass on her way from the Gare du Nord to the specialist whom she had decided to consult. The streets smelt like stokeholds in the choking heat, so strong was the bituminous reek sent up by the putty-like asphalt pavement under foot. Meanwhile the great throng of incurious, apathetic passers-by made the poor girl's affection-seeking soul fully understand what is meant by the "loneliness of crowds." Amid all the nerve-shattering noises of traffic and the din of human bustle, she felt as forlorn as though wandering in an unpeopled, trackless desert.

Quite sad and weary in the consciousness of her failing health and utter solitude, Odile walked on without speaking to her companion.

But she thought a good deal, as was always her way. She marvelled that human beings could endure existence in all this sweltering heat and dust, packed together, cheek by jowl, a prey to the feverish excitement so manifest on all their faces. Occasionally she glanced with much sympathy through the polished plate-glass windows of the great department stores at the sallow, drawn faces of the young shop girls, about her own age, whose lot condemned them to perpetual patience with all sorts and conditions of customers, and to bear "the burden and the heat" of their day with everlasting smiles.

Then her thoughts reverted homeward, to the quiet, sunny spot at the bottom of the Abbaye gardens, deep down by the banks of the Jouine. She wondered what Jacques might be doing just then, and especially if he were endeavoring to make out the real reason for her unexpected trip to Paris. Already, after less than one hour in the metropolis, she was feeling like a bird whose first flight from the nest had landed him on an unknown and inhospitable shore. Her chief desire was to get back home without delay. Indeed, had she given way to this feeling, it would certainly have dragged her away from Paris without giving her time to fulfil the one duty that had

brought her there. Wherefore she speedily suppressed it for what it was—a very foolish notion.

Onward she fared, then, amid itinerant newsvendors, hoarsely crying the daily papers; among clerks and employees of all ages and both sexes, the women among them for the most part smartly gowned; and then further and further, past rows of offices, whence emerged audacious junior office boys, and past bargain-sale establishments, at whose thresholds stood merry young salesmen, leaning lightly against their pyramids of "remnant" calico, both hands behind their backs, with eyes discreetly ogling the distinguished passer-by.

Luckily the goal of Odile's painful pilgrimage, the town residence of Dr. Holtaut, a famous consultant in diseases of the chest, was now quite close at hand. The great man's flat was on the third floor of the corner building, and thither Odile and her companion proceeded to ascend, very slowly and silently, up a long and dark but well-kept staircase, so thickly carpeted that their footfalls were perfectly inaudible. Poor Odile was decidedly "impressed" by the time she stood ringing at the fateful door.

The electric bell was answered by a nondescript domestic, half parlor-maid, half hos-

pital nurse, who showed the newcomers into a gorgeously furnished but also appallingly commonplace drawing-room. At a crisis of keen mental anguish like the present Odile would have given worlds for her new surroundings to present something quiet and consolatory in their appearance, like the well-appointed anteroom, for instance, in some good priest's house. Alack, the worthy doctor had neither taste nor religion, and his "artistic" selections were as vulgar as they were indubitably expensive.

About half a dozen other patients were already seated here and there about the room, not speaking to one another, and looking unutterably bored. Their eyes showed something of the hunted look of felons in the dock on trial for their lives, who feel pretty sure what the jury's verdict will be from the way in which the judge has summed up against them.

Odile felt they were staring at her as she rather bashfully chose two seats for herself and her companion. But once she had sat down she was speedily made to feel, if possible, more uncomfortable than before. The lightest rustle of her gown or movement of her body brought half a dozen pairs of eyes focused full upon her, all frankly inquisitive, and, indeed, inquisitorial. A portly, asthmatic indi-

vidual, who sat wheezing in an arm-chair directly opposite her, simply made it his business to stare the girl out of countenance.

There was perhaps some little excuse. Odile's features had rarely before displayed such arresting and disquieting beauty. She seemed lovelier than ever, but with a strange, wan, far-away loveliness such as great painters of the German school know so well how to impart to their concepts of the mystic Rhine-maids. In a more Christian simile, she displayed the beauty of a soul fast outwearing its body.

Meanwhile she was tortured by a twofold agony, not new, indeed, but far more intense than since her affliction had begun. The lesser pain arose from her despairing anxiety to know the best or the worst concerning her health and her chances of human happiness; the greater from her fear of having to face Jacques with the bad news, should she undergo sentence of death. To beguile such thoughts, or rather, as far as possible, to prevent herself from thinking at all, she picked up at haphazard some specimens of the reading matter that lay in thick profusion on the nearest table. As might be expected, it was the poorest of poor stuff imaginable. For medical men, who receive all and sundry, and are therefore desirous

to wound no conceivable susceptibilities, have something approaching genius itself in their choice of the colorless and the banal in periodical literature. Odile soon realized this, turning over the big pile of fashion journals, illustrated weeklies and monthlies, and blameless, flat, comic journals, all provided for the amusement and instruction of poor readers with one foot in the grave.

Every time the consulting-room door was opened for the exit of one patient and the entry of another, Odile felt more and more like a criminal in the cells below the court, awaiting the jailer's summons to the dock. However, she reflected, if it came to that, all mankind lay under the selfsame sentence of death. More morbidly, she allowed her mind to brood upon the fact that, while the generality of men are allowed to quaff the bitter cup at almost a single draught—only a little less rapidly, indeed, than soldiers who meet death on the field of battle—there are others—herself and her present neighbors, for instance—whose whole lives of lingering pain are so many living deaths, in which they must witness daily the progressive decay of mortal frames so harmoniously, so wondrously made that in the Creator's first ordinance they were not meant to die at all. How impotent was this vaunted

modern science, the girl mused, in such a case as hers! If she were now quite willing to pass through yonder door and consult the physician within, it was in no hope of cure—it was merely in order to be furnished with an answer to the questions of those she loved at home. It was not to Paris she would go for deliverance from the way of life apparently marked out for her.

In this frame of mind Odile, when her name was called, stood up, bade the maid remain where she was, and entered the consulting-room alone.

As his patients and friends are aware, the distinguished Dr. Holtaut both was and is a short, stout man of somewhat stumpy build, with a bristly mustache, coarse fells of black hair on the back of his wrists and hands, and extremely short fingers and thumbs, terminating in square-topped nails. In the medical world he is regarded by his colleagues as an able and even a leading physician, but no courtier. Odile had heard of his peculiar reputation in this matter, and it was precisely the man's blunt and brutal outspokenness which had commended him to her when thinking of the specialist to choose. She still retained all confidence in her family doctor, but she knew that that kind and learned old friend would have wrapped up the truth so carefully for her

that she would have left him quite full of the hope that "springs eternal" in the human breast, and also quite ignorant of the very information she sought and now felt she could no longer do without.

"Doctor," she began in the steadiest tones at her command, "I have come to consult you because I am assured that you are always outspoken in your dealings with your patients."

The squat figure before her blurted something that sounded like "Yes."

"Will you give me your word of honor," continued Odile, "to tell me the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

"I shall not stand upon ceremony, I assure you," grunted the other.

"Very well, then. And now just one question. What would you say of a consumptive girl who has taken it into her head to get married?"

"Any young girl," declared the little great man, "who is well assured that she is in a tuberculous condition and nevertheless enters into a contract of marriage is an abominably selfish person, in the first place, and a genuine female scoundrel in the second."

"Sound my chest, please," was Odile's only comment.

He set to work at once, in his customary

rough fashion, using his unaided ear without a stethoscope, and ramming the side of his shaggy head right against her breast without the faintest consideration for anything but the task in hand. Then, using percussion, his short, stumpy fingers went hurriedly to work, dealing merciless taps here and there till they halted over an unsound spot. Meanwhile the running fire of interjections were all indicative of professional disapproval—"not up to much —dull—h'm—rather dull—" and so forth. This kind of thing soon set Odile in a tremble. But she had less equivocal reasons for alarm when the uncouth practitioner had worked his way round to the region of the internally wounded side. There, after percussion and auscultation, Dr. Holtaut simply broke out into a torrent of ordinary bad language, just cursing and swearing away with no more restraint than if he were seated on the terrace of his favorite café.

The examination soon ended after that, and the eccentric physician glared at Odile.

"So you are the young person who wanted to get married," he said.

Odile did not flinch from his gaze. "Yes, doctor," she replied.

"Well, what do you think about it now?" said he.

"What do *you* think, doctor?" she rejoined, with agonized intensity of emphasis.

Callous and even brutal as this able man had undoubtedly become, he yet hesitated before speaking out his mind. The whole soul of the girl before him seemed concentrated in her pleading eyes, and to be thence piteously imploring respite, if not release. The sight of such youth and loveliness in dire affliction proved a little too much for him. In a shamefaced sort of way he began to work himself into a self-justifying fit of temper, as the best means of controlling the compassion he really felt.

"It is outrageous," he complained. "It is really outrageous the way you ladies lay steel-traps for a luckless medical man to go out and put his foot in! After all is said and done, the mental and the moral sides of our organism *do* count for something in matters of healing, and if you patients yourselves come here and entrap your adviser into giving clear statements of adverse opinion, why, so much the worse for you, that is all I can say. Out of sheer wantonness, or so it would seem, you rid yourselves of faith and confidence, the two powerful levers, the two miraculously powerful levers——"

But Odile heard him no more. He might now scold or console as he listed; she had sunk

on the leathern couch beside her, without a cry or a moan, quite lifeless to all outward seeming.

And lifeless in a sense she may well be said to be, poor child, being dead to her love and therefore dead to the world and all earthly hopes. With fear-dilated eyes she lay gazing into vacancy as though seeing already her dreary road of suffering, leading on and on, by lonely and desolate paths, through countless abasements and humiliations, to the icy coast of the Valley of the Shadow itself!

She speedily realized that she must not remain lying where she was. Other patients were outside, she knew, awaiting their turns in the anteroom, and the doctor himself was pacing up and down like a caged bear in front of her, impatiently clutching his hands behind his back. He was in a manifest hurry to get rid of her. People must learn to hurry over their sorrows in Paris, as over every other business of their lives. Above all, they must be taught to keep their troubles to themselves.

Odile arose, still feeling stunned, and quivering in every limb. She was about to go out of the room when she suddenly bethought her that this, her first, would assuredly be her very last visit to this specialist. She did not wish to leave her address and allow the bill to be forwarded on to the Abbaye—of all places!—and so

she turned round and placed three louis in gold on the doctor's desk. Agreeably startled by a fee so much higher than the customary modest charges made by even the leading French consultants, Dr. Holtaut expressed his cordial thanks, but Odile checked him.

"Pray do not mention it, doctor," she said in low and sweet but very broken tones. "You have done me a true service, although necessarily a very painful one. But I am thankful to you all the same. Just imagine! I was on the point of getting married!"

The physician tugged at his beard and stammered out certain commonplaces of would-be consolation:

"Do not give up heart too quickly," he said. "Where there is life there is hope, you know. In my own student days I came across some extraordinary instances of longevity in consumptive patients. Why, I have actually handled subjects in the dissecting-room fully eighty years of age, who must have suffered from tubercular disease for upwards of half a century! With youth on your side you must never say die, you know. But of course you must take precautions—any amount of precautions. You must live in the country, Mademoiselle. There is nothing like it for cases of this kind."

"I always live in the country," said Odile. "My home is there."

"Good—that is good. Keep that up now, and——"

For politeness' sake Odile listened a little while longer to various practical if all rather obvious precautionary suggestions, and then, feeling she had sacrificed sufficiently on the altar of convention, bowed courteously to Dr. Holtaut and bade him farewell.

Walking back to the station, Odile was guarded in her speech with the old servant at her side, and even made it her business to appear interested in the thousand little nothings of the street. Afternoon school hours had just ended at the Condorcet as they came past it, and the boys were trooping out of school with merry shouts, and romping to and fro along the pavement. One of their number—a quite tiny little fellow in a sailor-suit—came prancing wildly along, and, as ill-luck would have it, bumped right into Odile. Being a good little boy, he grew red in the face and begged pardon so prettily and with such engaging sincerity that Odile picked him up in her arms and even held him there for some moments. The child was fair in hair and complexion—as fair as herself—but his eyes were

black and sparkling with life and health and fun.

"What is your name, little friend?" asked Odile, replacing him on terra firma.

Proud as Punch, the little boy squared his small shoulders under his navy-blue tunic and answered:

"My name is Jacques, Mademoiselle."

With that he was captured by the careful nursemaid who had been sent to meet him and convey him home. Odile sighed as she watched the chubby, retreating figure.

"My own little one would have been christened Jacques, too," she murmured.

The incident, perhaps, might have been expected to render her grief more acute, but no, it soothed her, and even seemed to benumb her whole being into a species of painless despair. She could now look at the faces in the unending crowd with a sense of no longer belonging to the bustling every-day world of hopes and fears. She had become a child of the vast household of mourners, whose fragile earthly frames are the only weak fetters that bind them to earth, what time their spirits pine for the hour of deliverance, through fleeting days or years of pain and sore privation.

Absorbed in such thoughts as these, Odile reached the portico of Saint-Roch's, and it oc-

curred to her that it were well to enter the church and open her heart to God.

All was silence within the great fane, whose dense masonry seems to make it at all times an island of utter peace, amid all the storm and fret of the feverish world without. A few worshipers were kneeling here and there in the side-chapels on either hand. As some poet has said—some poet, by the way, who seems to have believed that his sex dispensed him from the need of prayer—"no matter where a woman may find an altar set up, she will always find something to say to it."

Certes, this was true of Odile to-day. She passed, however, from one altar to another until she reached the Chapel of the Agony, on the left of the mighty nave. There she paused, for there, so it seemed, a message was awaiting her.

It was perhaps five o'clock in the afternoon. The flood of sunshine streaming through the storied panes bathed in many-hued radiance the living marble where the sculptor has carved the figure of our agonized Lord, with drooping arms and weary hands, and sorrowful, sacred face upturned to heaven. Kneeling down, with her eyes on this semblance of Our Saviour, Odile began a most dolorous litany of her own, made up, not from the courageous *Fiat* of the

agony in the garden, but from echoes of the dereliction upon Mount Calvary.

"My God, my God," she sobbed, "why, why have You forsaken me? Why did love ever grow in my heart, since it can only prove for me an added pang? I do not understand, Lord —have mercy on my weakness. Have pity on *him,* too. Have pity on both of us, for we love each other, and yet we must now lead severed lives. Have pity on the loneliness of our two poor hearts. Have pity upon all to whom my heart goes out. Lord, I am afraid—I am in pain—and all is dark as night around me. I do not want to go into my grave yet! If You *will,* You *can* cure me. Oh, surely, it cannot be that You use Your power to give Your creatures such pain as this, because You Yourself suffered for us all!"

These broken plaints may perhaps strike some as not only in the nature of things incoherent, but also as pathetically ignorant, in the Christian sense. It must be borne in mind that Odile's motherless girlhood and very casual religious education had left her sadly ill-grounded in the fundamental truths of Catholic faith and practice.

"Lord," she continued breathlessly, "suffer the star of happiness to beam once more in my skies! Like the poor and the wretched who

came and flung themselves at Your knees in the course of Your mortal life, entreating You to heal them, I now drag myself to Your feet, stricken down and beaten flat to the earth. I am nothing, Lord, and You are my All! Heal me, because I love *him* so, and because You are Love itself! Heal me, because You are meek and humble of heart. Heal me, because You have said: 'Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.' Heal me, because when I was quite a child my father used to join my little hands together in prayer to You, and always told me You were the *good* God. That is the earliest Name by which I knew You. You are good, and Your goodness is the only single one of Your perfections I want to know anything about. You are infinitely good—yes, I believe it. *Good* Lord, have pity—pity——"

But the white figure of the stricken Christ seemed cold and irresponsive to the poor girl's immoderate grief.

"It is too hard," she concluded, almost audibly, as she passed down the great empty nave. "Ah, my God, why do You not answer me?"

With these despondent words she left the church, unsoothed and unconsoled. For her ultimate great good she was allowed to feel

"'I am suffering——oh, I *am* suffering!' repeated she, as though forcing a reply from him."—*Page* 404

of her safe arrival, and thus prevent uneasiness.

The Abbé Hans was walking up and down in the garden saying his office. Odile entered the house without knocking, passed through, made her way to the old man unannounced, and stood silently before him without one word of excuse or explanation. But the tale told in her eyes was one of such terrible grief and desolation that the good pastor immediately led her to a garden seat close by. It was at the extremity of his small domain, and commanded a wide view of the surrounding landscape, now bathed in the glories of the dying sun.

Sitting down by the Abbé's side, Odile wept without speaking for a while. And then, after telling how the expert in Paris had that day condemned her to die, she became most dreadfully animated, and proceeded, in the mysterious calm of the eventide, to utter wild and whirling words that perhaps had best be set down here in the cold compression of an abstract, as thus:

That he, the Abbé Hans, might say what he would; God was not kind; and all was over between Him and her for evermore. That what little faith she ever had was now being driven from her heart like a withered leaf whirling in the storm. That she had gone out of the door

at Saint Roch's just like a heathen, without even a sign of the cross. That she meant to say no more prayers. That, as a consequence, her disease was bound to take its course more quickly. That, in the meanwhile, she would play the fatalist and await her doom, chained down to the stake of life, and blessing the approach of the hour decreed for her deliverance. That there was a curse on the day when she first received a life she had not sought—and what a life! a loveless, chaotic, doubt-entangled, murky existence! That her life—that *every one's life*—was a tangled and torturing maze, wherein God so hid Himself as to seem annihilated, because He fled from the sight of outstretched, suppliant hands; yes, and He remained deaf to the wildest pleadings—"and yet," she exclaimed, scarce knowing what she said, "He maintains that He exists and is infinitely good! How perverse and malign it all is! A thousand times better never to have been born at all!"

"You must not say that, Odile," put in the Abbé Hans very gently.

But she did say it, and reaffirmed it, and went on to say much worse, in half-frenzied and wholly self-pitying iteration. Meanwhile the experienced old shepherd of souls was observing her very closely. He thought it best, in

her particular case, to wait and let things take their course till the storm should have blown itself out. He knew the pathology of women's souls, and that all their objections, revolts, and ignorances are—in familiar phrase—"much better out than in." In spiritual crises such as these, especially when aggravated by morbid physical conditions, he dreaded no symptom worse than a sullen and obdurate silence. Wherefore he possessed his soul in patience if not in peace and waited until the girl at his side had said all, and really much more than she intended to say. Even then he offered no comment for some moments. This was not for want of the right and priestly thing to say. In simple truth the fatherly old man could hardly control his voice for a moment, so deeply did he pity this poor child, now crushed by the weight of her sorrows.

"I am suffering—oh, I *am* suffering!" repeated she, as though forcing a reply from him.

"Dear child!" was all the old lips could falter.

"But *why* does the good God—why does *'God,'* then—" she said, abruptly correcting herself—"why does He make me suffer like this? You are His minister. You *owe* me, of obligation, a straight answer to my question."

"Are you strong enough to hear it?"

"Yes."

"Dear little Odile, when you ask me that question you are like some very young soldier under fire on his first field of battle who should ask a comrade, 'What harm have I done the general that he exposes me thus to all the horrors of war?' The lad would be promptly told, 'Because you are a soldier; that is why.' In the battle of life we are all of us more or less wounded in one way or another. The great plain at our feet below has been scorched to-day by the same sun that will ripen its harvests to-morrow, and lend each ear of corn a deeper tinge of gold. And so we ourselves, poor creatures of a day, who strut our little hour, and fume and fret, we are all the while being fashioned by pain into fitness for the radiance and the splendors of eternity.

"Just as gold must be tried by fire, so our souls must be assayed by pain, to burn away all dross and base alloy, and leave only what is pure and precious in the bottom of the crucible. Let me hasten to add, Odile, that even here below grief sets a halo on our brows. I have loved you dearly since the day I held you in these arms to baptize you at the font, and you prove to me now how well you realize and confide in the depth of my affection. But from this day forth my love will be deeper and tenderer than ever, because Sorrow has marked

you for her own—because, when I look at your sad little face and tear-dimmed eyes I am made to feel that the Angel of Grief has passed your way, and hallowed you with the consecrated loveliness of all who mourn. Yes, the mourner is a sacred being—a being apart. 'Those who love while they sorrow, and toil while they grieve, Heaven and earth in their one web of life interweave.' The mystery of it—of suffering—*is* a mystery indeed—an inevitable part or sequel of the great mystery of the permission of moral evil. And yet it is from suffering that whatsoever is best and loveliest and noblest in human nature has its rise. Without the pangs of travail no mother can be blessed with a child. Even war, that direst of scourges, elicits sublime acts of heroism from the soldier. Come now, Odile, child, tell me you will rebel no more; tell me that after arraigning the justice of the All Holy God, you will kneel at His feet and bless Him. Speak to Him unaffectedly in natural, heartfelt words. 'Yes, Lord Jesus,' you may say, 'how true are those words of Thy beatitude, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." ' If you say your prayer of reparation in this church and before the tabernacle, you may add: 'Yes, Lord, I know that Thou art here truly present on the altar, and that Thou art even now gaz-

ing upon me with divinely compassionate eyes. Thy tender heart is grieved to see me suffer. When I put forth my hands to Thee, I believe that I *do* take hold on Thee, through the veil between us, which grows thinner year by year. Thou seemest to withdraw Thyself a little while, but it is only a little while, until the night shall have sped, and the morning shall break, when, "stooping down, Thine arms shall gather me." ' "

"But what if that 'morning' be only a myth?" objected Odile.

"It is *to-day* that is the myth, the dream, and not *to-morrow*," replied the Abbé tranquilly. He could see that his words were going home. "This life—the troublous *to-day*—is an unpleasant dream. We shall awaken from it with eyes wide open to the splendors of eternal dawn. The life to come—the great *to-morrow* —is true and real, and wholly inevitable. It were impossible that it should *not* exist, and exist eternally. These difficulties and temptations against faith that assail us are permitted by Our Lord, Who in His wisdom allows us to be tormented by them at times in order to elicit from us more fervent acts of faith. Do not argue with the enemy, as Eve once did! No, turn to Our Lord and say to Him: 'Ah, Lord, Thou art goodness, Thou art kindness, Thou

art gentleness itself! My reason and my will shall never doubt of this, no matter what my senses and vain imagination may suggest. The flowers of hope still bloom in this sorrow-stricken heart. See, they open their petals before Thee. Yea, Lord, although plunged in the deep darkness of this world, I can already behold the first faint flush of the dawn on the hills of eternal day!' "

Odile leaned forward on the rustic table in front of them, and listened to her fatherly old friend and guide without gainsaying him. She gave his words time to sink deep in her soul, keeping her eyes, the while, on the broad gold line now rimming the western heavens.

"Ah, Monsieur le Curé," she said softly at length, "do pray that I may have faith."

"I shall pray for that intention," replied the old man. "And I shall also pray that you may be happy."

"Happy!" she protested, rebellious once more—or so it seemed.

"Yes, *happy,* my child," the Abbé repeated, laying stress on the word, with the assurance of unwavering hope. "I shall pray that you may be supremely happy, even in the midst of these tears of patient anguish."

"No, Monsieur le Curé, there is no more happiness in store for me while I live. It is a word

I must strike out of my dictionary, once and for all. To be happy"—she added, smiling bitterly—"if you only knew how foolish and impossible it is to expect me to be *that!*"

"From you, little Odile," said the Abbé, "I can, and do, expect impossibilities. Were I dealing, now, with some girl of your age, who was crushed by the same affliction, but gave evidence of a less high-minded temperament than your own, I would say to her: 'Get married! No matter what that doctor said, it is your absolute right as a woman, were you lying on your deathbed.' But *you,* Odile, you are very different. You hold the nobler and more generous view, in which I concur and wholly encourage you, that it would be very self-seeking to procure a little glow of human love at the cost of poor, puny little children, who might have to pay yet heavier toll than yourself to those ills that flesh is heir to. A Catholic girl affected by what has been termed 'the white plague' never enters into earthly espousals—when her name is Odile. Yet she is none the less beloved, and none the less loving for that—nay, rather, she both gives and receives fuller measure of the truest and most single-hearted affection. There is a blessing upon you, Odile, for you will die young. And yet you bemoan your lot! Dear child, you ought to be singing,

as by God's grace you presently *will* sing, *Magnificats* of happiness and gratitude! Even the pagan poets before Our Lord's time believed that 'those whom the gods love die young.' "

"But what of Jacques?" asked Odile, looking up. "*He* will be left behind!"

"Do you love him?"

"Indeed I do!"

"Very well, little Odile, dear child, let me bid you once and for all to render thanks to God for deeming you worthy of the narrow path. By taking you soon to Himself He will spare your sensitive soul the trivialities, the meannesses inseparable from our ways here below. He will save your wings, now poised for the upward flight, from trailing in the dust of this world's humiliations. If the full tale of years were to be vouchsafed to you, there would still be in store the sad downhill journey of life. The radiant little fairy of the Vale of Api would become an old, old woman. Her wearied frame would press down upon her soul, and perhaps even affect it with some traces of what is least lovable in poor complex human nature —because none of us can spend a long life in this world unscathed. That is why Our Lord loved little children so well; His work in their souls is still fresh from the Maker's hand; their little hearts are even purer and more limpid

than their innocent childish eyes. If you leave us soon, Odile, you will be spared this downhill journey. You will take wing from the summit of the hill. And Jacques will retain no memories of you but such as speak to him of tender and truest love. You will be like a flower that appears and lives a flower's brief life—'one happy morning-tide'—all fragrant and cool, and dew bespangled, glittering in the rays of the rising sun. It will be culled before the blazing noon, and so at eventide no man shall see it withered on the stem, or bowed down by the burden of the day and the heats, or perhaps even trampled to the stony earth by the careless feet of passers-by. Oh, blessed, blessed Odile, who are so soon to depart from this weary world, leaving none but gracious memories behind, precious recollections, to enrich the small store of things in life that are never, never forgotten!"

The old man had spoken these words from his heart, quite simply and unassumingly, as became him in his threefold capacity of priest, and father, and friend. His whole manner, and the tender sympathy of his tones bespoke the skilled and affectionate shepherd, engaged in dressing the hurts of some poor lamb of the flock, badly torn by the briers of the wayside.

When he had finished, she was weeping happier, less stormy tears, from eyes still turned to the vasty golden splendors of the west, as though held there by some hallowed fascination, affording her soul, perchance, a prelude and promise of the light that knows no setting, of the everlasting brightness of the city of God.

For some moments the wise priest left her thus to herself, alone with her thoughts and God, in the restful calm of the evening air. She sat motionless and marble-white—beautiful as a statue of Sorrow, illumined on the brows with one ray of God's pity.

To summon her back to life the Abbé called her by name, very softly, in his firm and paternal but gentle tones.

"Odile!" he said.

She started slightly—and then rose and turned toward him with a gesture of unutterable gratitude.

"How good you are!" she said.

"God is goodness itself," he replied. "God is infinitely kinder and more loving than any of His children."

"You will repeat to Jacques, will you not, the words of comfort you have just spoken to myself?"

"I shall do so."

"And when I am going—you understand—

you will be there, will you not? Promise to be with me, Father! Thank you—and—and then, *afterward,* you will be good to him, won't you? —you will not leave him all alone to himself, you will never let him lose your friendship?"

"Never!"

"Thank God, and thank you. And now good-by for the present, Father. I shall carry your words with me deep down in my heart as a source of strength and consolation. But pray for me—pray a great deal for me."

There was a private pathway between two hedgerows which led from the priest's garden to the church. Odile went out this way, and passed into the Lady Chapel. There she fell down on her knees by the plain deal bench where the children from the orphanage were wont to sit during Mass. For the second time that day she essayed to collect her thoughts in prayer. With instinctive delicacy the Abbé left her alone during this final effort of her trying day, and contented himself, as he paced to and fro in the garden, with uniting his own earnest prayers to hers—to those piteous supplications which he knew must be arising to God at that instant from the poor child's broken heart.

After a little while Odile got up slowly and painfully from her knees, as though she bore

the world's weight on her shoulders, and passed out through the churchyard and into the narrow lane where she had walked with Jacques on her betrothal day about two years before. As then, there was glorious sunshine, but it was richer now, and warmer, breathing promise of the ripening harvests. In the distance the chateau of La Ferlandière, lying bathed in the glory of the sunset, seemed waiting for Odile. She gazed at the windows, flashing gold and crimson in the level rays, and then halted for a moment on her homeward course. Then, stretching out her arms in the stillness of the silent fields, amid the kindly solitude all around her, she spoke her last words of human revolt, from a heart which, only that morning, had dared to hope for earthly bliss.

"Oh, Jacques!" she cried, "farewell—farewell. Good-by, and God be with you!"

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE course of the following morning Odile sought and found some respite from grievous thoughts by setting her embroidery frame at the window, and resuming work on the cross of a chasuble intended for the church at Fumeçon—a particularly poor parish. While thus employed, she caught sight of Jacques and the Abbé Hans coming down the road to-

gether toward the Abbaye. She noted that they were engaged in earnest conversation, and could not help a certain clutching at the heart-strings as they approached.

Poor Odile! She knew that the dreaded moment had now come, and that she must presently face Jacques—by this time fully cognizant of the whole sad truth. He was so simple and straightforward that Odile was really afraid for the results so total a frustration of all his hopes might have upon him. Reeds and rushes are pliant, and bend, but oak-trees may break in the storm.

As they drew still nearer, and her lover's profile became more clearly defined against the shadow of the poplars, Odile studied his expression with growing anxiety. The aged Curé was speaking with slow deliberation, and Jacques was listening with eyes bent down and a very set look on his face. But, still, he was calm and self-controlled. How fervently did Odile yearn at that instant to be somehow spirited away from the scene and spared the pain of the interview! For painful she felt it must assuredly be, even more so than yesterday's explanation with the Curé, because she would have to begin all over again from the beginning. There are moments in life when the best of us pine for the ground at our feet

to open and swallow us down, entire. We would welcome a temporary grave as a refuge from the agonized problem in hand, every way out of which seems bestrewn with shards and thorns. It was thus with Odile that morning.

Besides the misery of rehearsing yesterday's details, for relief from which she would have given much indeed, Odile was further tortured by self-questionings concerning the attitude Jacques might adopt. Was he likely to accept her decision as final? Would he argue the case with her? Or would he refuse the liberty she offered him?

Meantime, while these thoughts coursed through her head at such a rate that she knew not what to decide, the two friends came nearer and nearer. Odile was still at her wits' end when the latch of the white wicket-gate clicked and Jacques and the Abbé walked up the garden path.

Odile watched the former's advancing figure with considerable hesitation. Should she go to meet him, as so often before, in other and happier days? *That* seemed quite out of the question. To say truth, she felt as though rivetted to the floor, with barely enough courage left her to wait upon events. But just at that moment Jacques raised his head and caught sight of her seated by the window.

"Odile," he cried, speaking up from below in a well-nigh trembling voice, "may the Abbé and I come up, please?"

She nodded a sad assent, and presently their footfalls were heard coming up the stair. In another moment the Curé had entered the room where she sat, followed closely by Jacques.

Odile remained in her corner by the window, almost crouching there, indeed, poor child, like a wounded bird cowering in its nest. But Jacques walked over to her and gently raised the fair, drooping head and took the trembling little hands in his. Then while she sank her head upon his breast without uttering a word, he began to deliver his soul, in quiet, very tender tones.

"Odile," he said, "what you ask, or at any rate what you thought of asking, is utterly impossible. No mere question of good or bad health can possibly come between you and me, as you imagined it might and should do. My love for you, and the peculiar beauty and goodness that evoke it, are far and away above all questions of that kind. I look upon our two lives as far more closely interwoven than those of the clinging ivies and oaks in yonder forest, which are inseparable without injury to both, and can scarce be distinguished apart. For

myself, my whole life has need of yours. I pine for your soul as the bee for the flower, as the plant for the dew, as the exile for his native land. I cannot live out my days without you. Who, then, or what, can sever us each from other, Odile?

"Can sickness? But that which I love in you is your *self*, your personality, your beautiful soul, against which disease is powerless. Ill-health may wreak its worst upon the poor frail vesture of the body, but then our flesh is no more than the mere outward garment, or livery, of the soul. Or, if we take another comparison, the diamond in the jewel-case is none the less precious because the receptacle is not, like itself, imperishable.

"Can death separate us, Odile? No, truly. Were you to be taken from me, fond recollection would abide, the one lone star to cheer me on my way, even as that other beacon, the star of hope—the hope of making you mine—was wont to guide me in the years that are past. I would seek and I would find messages from you in all the created loveliness amid which you have lived out your life. Far out in the heart of the woods I would feel your presence near me whenever the wind blew and the leaves of the forest came tumbling against my cheeks. At night, whensoever I looked to the silent

heavens, I would behold you in spirit smiling down upon me from above, through warp and woof of the veil hiding this world from the next. I would know you were there, unseen to earthly eyes, but really there, and thus very close to me—for distance counts as nothing in the portico of God's home. Your presence would enfold me, and make manifest the Divine Tenderness of Him who said: 'It is not good that man should be alone.'

"No, no, Odile, we have now been joined together; we shall not lightly be put asunder. True love—the love that goes hand in hand with duty, the love that is commended by the voice of conscience—such love is stronger than all its foes—is stronger than death itself.

"Besides, dear Odile, things have not reached that pass as yet. I know you well, and I know your power of seeing a gloomy side to everything. You are too apt to darken the whole outlook on life by indulgence in groundless fears—or at any rate in exaggerated ones. Although not greatly older than yourself, I have thought out one or two matters fairly thoroughly, and I only wish I could make you realize how little I value the haughty decrees of a physiological science that has become as proud as—frequently enough—it is helpless and futile. Where shall you find an infallible

man of medicine? Do you think these materialistic physicians have at their disposal *all* the data required for a faultless diagnosis? They can make certain efforts to ascertain, or infer, the existence of abnormal phenomena. They do so—and there they stop—and draw their own conclusions. But as for what lies beyond their cramped horizon, it escapes them altogether. Take, for example, your faith as an earnest Catholic girl, your prayers, too, and the prayers we all of us offer for your sake—and then add my human love for you, and the sheltering care I am only too eager to provide—add to this the quite inconceivably higher love and divine compassion of God, who loves us as no mother ever loved her children—*this* counts for nothing with the overwise modern physician! As if human tenderness and inspired religion were not working miracles every hour of our lives! There is only one thing I want to keep in mind to-day, and it is this: Almighty God, in an infinitely tender refinement of loving-kindness, has made confidence a virtue—nay, more, He has ordained that hope shall be a duty, incumbent on each one of His children. I have hope, Odile—I have the strongest hope, if ever a man had. No, God will not sunder those whom once He has joined together. Nor, I humbly trust, will

He cast the shadow of death between our outstretched arms."

Jacques continued in this strain for some little while longer, standing up by the window, still open to the balmy summer breeze. The sweet scent of the flowers came up from below, and the glad sunlight played on the lovers' brows from out of a cloudless sky. Odile was caught up, as it were, in a fresh stream of life, and made to feel once more the buoyant powers of a great love that showed stronger and deeper and unutterably wider in its horizons, under each new piercing light of sorrow. What wonder that, no matter how falteringly at first, she began to emerge from the gloom into which her meeting with the harsh physician had plunged her? Putting out her hand to Jacques, in the frank way she had of old, she addressed him gratefully, yet with almost a quaint note of reproach:

"What are you about, then, Jacques?" she said. "You are ever so kind, and yet you may be acting quite cruelly, without meaning it at all. Must I come back to life, then, for your sake, and then die again, and leave you once more? Truly, so far as I know myself, I think I was ready to go this time."

The fact is that Odile had been taken completely by surprise. She had not been in any

way prepared for so firm and calm an attitude on her lover's part. She knew that he was intensely and profoundly devout, but she had wondered how far the serenity of his faith could be sustained under the sudden impact of so heavy a blow. As so often in her life, she measured his strength by her own great weakness, and felt fairly sure he would be unable to bear up against bad news.

Consequently she was inwardly abashed by recollections of her previous revolt. Here was Jacques, upon whom the heavier share of the burden must fall, evincing no doubts of a happy future—no, not one, nor for one single instant—but, on the contrary, endeavoring to dispel her own deep dejection with brave words of hope.

"Do you really and truly mean it, Jacques—that all is not yet over between us?" she resumed.

"I will answer your question by another, Odile," he replied. "Do you believe that if God so wills He can cure you, yes or no?"

"Of course He can. But *will* He?"

"He will," said the young man simply. "Yes, He will, because we shall go and ask it of Him, and plead with Him heart to heart. He Himself has said: 'When two or three of you are gathered together in My name, you

shall ask the Father whatsoever you will, and it shall be done unto you.' We shall all of us go and entreat from Him the blessing of Odile's health. I may say that I have already decided upon the very spot of our pilgrimage —the actual gate, as it were, where we shall knock, that it may be opened unto us."

While he spoke these latter words, Odile's eyes mutely questioned his. He sat down beside her, therefore, and began to explain, in his all but fatherly way.

"Listen, Odile," he said. "I was much in love with you when you were quite a little thing, with your hair down your back—yes, I was, although I daresay it never once occurred to you at the time."

"You need not be too sure of that," put in Odile with a smile—the first in those forty-eight weary hours.

"Well, I loved you dearly, and with so honest and boyish a love that I am sure God blessed us both. One day, in the course of holiday rambles through Alsace, which is not so wonderfully far from here—by-the-by, I have never mentioned to any living soul what I am now going to tell you—I went up the Odilienberg, or Mount St. Odile, a historic peak, which I had always loved on account of its name, long before I set eyes upon it—as I made it my busi-

ness to do, singling it out from the rest of the range, the moment I reached the Vosges. It was for your sake that I clambered to the summit, which I found most deeply interesting. Picture to yourself an eagle's eyrie perched upon crags overtopping vast forests of pine, and—at the highest point of all—an old, old convent, first built in Merovingian days, where the tomb of your holy patron is still preserved and honored. I said a good many prayers before it for your intentions. I commended you, I confided you to the intercession of the great patroness of Alsace. 'Bless my little Odile,' I would say to the saint again and again. 'Bless her, and obtain for her a part in your own great gifts and graces. Hold over her the victorious buckler of your loving protection. And pray God especially that she may become the joy and the sunshine of my life, which I can scarce conceive of without her!' All that was a long while ago. But now, Odile, I feel sure you will not refuse me your company to go back there again on pilgrimage. I want to thank the dear Saint for the happiness her prayers have already brought into my life—yes, because from that very first day I never lost hope of winning you. And mark my words, Saint Odile will continue her aid. I have never told you yet, in all these years, how I received holy com-

munion for your intention up there, in the quiet convent chapel, as fervently as I was able. I was without traveling companions; and indeed my people thought I was in Switzerland at the time. In reality I was making a sort of spiritual retreat in the mountains by myself—just talking to God about my soul and you, and about my love for you, and the future I trusted He had in store for us. So you see, Odile, you have been *mine* for ever and ever so long! All I beg from you, at present, is your kind permission to protect you from your own extreme readiness to give way to despair."

She seemed, by the dubious way in which she shook her head, to refuse to share the hopes held out. He added in a graver tone:

"Whatever you do, my dearest girl, don't go over to the enemy's side. If you think you cannot help me, at any rate don't fight *against* me."

Later in the afternoon, when Jacques had gone, Odile felt much revived. Like a plant beaten down to earth in heavy rain, she began to struggle erect again, and even to put forth fresh "leaves of tender hope." And in the succeeding days both she and Jacques became aware that they were now bound together by new, strong ties of love, over and above those already uniting them. Jacques was no longer

the faithful lover alone—he was mother and father, physician and nurse in one. Every fine day he was sure to be in readiness with a carriage from the La Ferlandière stables to take Odile driving in the wonderful Frières woods, there to drink in the balmy summer air under cloudless skies, when the excessive noonday heat of the sun had abated.

Odile was especially fond of watching the sun go down behind the picturesque heights of the Bois Roux. She even possessed an album, unique in its way, containing upwards of a hundred studies of sunsets, which she had made in water-color, all different and distinct in beauty. Some were royal displays of gold and crimson; others showed evening skies of angry red, glaring bloodshot as though great cities were burning beneath them; yet others depicted a sea-green west, with clouds of steely gray dotted everywhere, like sheep scattered far and wide in some illimitable pasture. So Jacques now made it his practice that henceforth the dear "patient" should have all opportunities of watching sunsets in the open. As often as it could be managed he contrived a hasty dinner with his sister and then drove over to the Abbaye for Odile and brought her out to a point in the long road beyond Noureuil, near the structure known as the Malvina Hut, com-

manding a wholly unbroken view of the western sky. Very wonderful sunsets can be witnessed from this point through the better part of the summer months. After stopping the carriage there Jacques shared with his fiancée the simple joy of watching the sun disappear in a blaze of light behind the distant belt of poplars on the Chauny road. Then, drawing rein, they would drive slowly home together in the gloaming, at peace with all the world.

On wet days Jacques not only did not lose his spirits, but contrived to infuse and diffuse them within the Abbaye walls. The stately old pile was made to re-echo, perhaps to its astonishment, with the sprightly jests of the grave young Count de la Ferlandière. Meanwhile he kept an eye to everything concerning Odile's régime, one consisting of a multiplicity of small precautions. With unceasing vigilance, yet quite unobtrusively withal, he saw that Odile conformed to rule without being made to feel galled by it. Strong and straightforward as he was by nature, he nevertheless developed an almost womanly inventiveness and delicate strategy in getting Odile to do things for her health's sake which she would never have otherwise consented to do.

Thus every now and again, for instance, Odile would encounter at some corner of the

road in the course of her day's drive the excellent physician whom Jacques and his sister were accustomed to call in at La Ferlandière, one Dr. Mutin by name. The meeting and conversation by the roadside would seem so very casual that the patient scarce knew till all was over that she had been medically inspected and duly advised. In this fashion she was spared the nervous irritation and anxiety of having to look forward to a doctor's calls at stated intervals.

Slowly and by degrees Jacques won her attention back to the things in life of which she had been fondest. In periods of acute depression or incipient despair men allow the ropes and hawsers of their moorings in life to become unlashed, and watch them with a chill indifference as they idly trail astern. These unfortunates, at such moments, are really dying piecemeal. They are drifting out to sea inch by inch, and when Death does come at last he has barely one fiber of life-line to sever. Even thus had it been with Odile. Her agony had lapsed into apathy, and most assuredly she must have gone with the tide had not Jacques interfered and made her pick up her moorings.

In salvage-work of this kind the very lightest lanyards have their value. Hence Jacques began by improving the Abbaye garden. It

was laid out anew, and soon made to look spruce under careful and skilled attention. And then, of evenings, Jacques innocently called in with pockets full of patterns and samples of material, wall-paper, and what not, or brought illustrated price-lists of more solid household plenishing. Willy-nilly, Odile was drawn to take interest in everything. Then Jacques asked for opinions and advice, and the discussions thus started were prolonged. Finally, to plow up, as it were, and to sow with salt the evil ground whence most of Odile's sad memories took their rise, he persuaded her to make the Paris journey again, this time as one of a four-cornered family party, himself, herself, his sister and her aunt.

And so it befell that early one fine morning the quartette drove to Tergnier, and thence took the six o'clock train for Paris. Somewhat surprised at herself, and at the second spring now breaking in her heart, Odile made a merry journey of it, and was safely landed with her companions in the Gare du Nord about half-past eight o'clock.

The sight of Paris streets at this hour in the morning was something novel in the girl's experience, so that both on this account and for better reasons she was really glad to be back in the capital once more, although it had proved

so wearying and distressing to her but a few days previously. Seated in a carriage beside Jacques, she was genuinely interested in noting for herself how the day's work began in the great city. Nimble little girls were obediently trotting their mothers' first errands to the dairy for breakfast milk; baker-women carried bread and hot rolls on their early rounds to customers; small herds of goats were being milked here and there outside kitchen-doors by the Basque drivers in charge; dapper young work-girls, dressmakers, milliners and general factory-hands, who had just reached the heart of the city from their homes in the outlying quartiers, tripped daintily along the pavement, this way and that, to their respective places of employment. Pale-faced and slender-handed, they wore their plain, neat frocks—of common material, but made and fitted in the best of good taste—with an instinctive grace not displayed by young women of their class in any other of the world's great cities. Besides these, there were flustered servant maids, hastening hither and thither; groups of good women returning from Mass, the calm afterglow of devotion still radiant on their brows; and clerks in abundance, sauntering to their offices, journal in hand, looking fresh from the night's good rest. On the pavement the flower-girls

with baskets, and in the roadway their more prosperous rivals with barrows, were arranging their fragrant purchases, fresh from the market, to meet the day's demands. All this and much more did Odile observe in streets now lively, indeed, but unspoiled as yet by the dust and heat of the day. The air was quite pleasantly fresh, and the bright, warm morning sun neither dazzled nor scorched, but cast a broad, cool screen of shade in almost every street.

So smooth was the course of that morning's progress that it seemed as though Paris desired to make up for her former boorish behavior. The friends were spared the troubles that are too frequently the lot of country purchasers in town for the day, who have to get back by a stated hour. The stores were not overcrowded, and the people behind the counter showed the keenest interest in all the young couple required, rummaging even their topmost shelves unasked in quest of suitable goods, to afford them the fullest possible selection. Odile was still busy at the Louvre when the clock at the Conseil d'Etat struck twelve. And then she talked of proceeding to the Bon Marché in the afternoon!

But Jacques here put his foot down. They had had enough fagging work for one day,

he said, and must leave by the 3.50 express. Odile protested, and he declaimed in fine mock-heroics that he was master, and stood upon his rights as such, the fiancé of to-day being the husband of to-morrow. Whereat, as he had intended, there was considerable merriment. Then they adjourned in a body for luncheon to a well-kept boulevard restaurant. Here again, quite contrary to all her expectations, Odile found that she could enjoy herself. She must needs have sole right of selecting the bill of fare, and chose only such dishes as were strange to the Abbaye cuisine. A gay beginning was made with a certain *"Potage Esaü,"* served specially for Jacques, whom the Biblical description both puzzled and amused. He looked rather dismayed when the tureen came to table, for the *potage* turned out to be honest lentil soup, neither more nor less, and not the culinary miracle he had somehow expected and—just for once in a way—desired. In the greatest glee Odile turned hoyden for the nonce, and insisted that he should empty his soup-plate to the very last red lentil. It need not be written how glad the good-humored Jeanne and the placid Aunt Bertha were to note the girl's high spirits.

Altogether, it was a capital day's outing, enjoyable, and in every way excellent.

"You see, Jacques," said Odile on the way back a few hours later, "you must never leave me any more. Everything seems simply lovely in my eyes—even that dreadful Paris—when you are by my side."

"Ho, ho, my lady fair!" chuckled Jacques. "Then who was the young maiden, I should like to know, who came all the way to Paris by herself and on the sly, to consult Dr. Holtaut alone?"

"By-the-by," laughed Odile, "it is a pity we did not leave cards on that paragon of polite physicians!"

"We can afford to wait a few months before getting even with him. Don't let us drop him those cards till we get back from our wedding-trip."

"Where shall we go for that? To St. Odile's?"

"No, the journey to St. Odile's will come off almost immediately—in a week or ten days' time; in fact while the weather is still quite warm. You don't mind?"

Odile put out her hand to him, with the ingenuous, quaint gesture so familiar since their betrothal, and her face lit up with the radiantly bright smile of older days.

"Why, dear," she replied, "how *can* I mind? I *mustn't* mind, you know, because you are

the master! You said so yourself a while ago, at the Louvre!"

Quite early in the morning of the day following these pleasant events Jacques rode past the Abbaye in the course of his before-breakfast rounds among the laborers working afield. As he skirted the long ivy-clad garden wall he noted with some little surprise that the windows of Odile's room were already wide open, at this somewhat unusual hour. He called out her name—not too loudly, of course—and there was no reply. A little uneasy in mind, he rode his horse on the grassy border adjoining the road, and thence right around the front of the Abbaye domain. When he reached the white wicket-gate by the lodge he caught sight of Odile within, wearing a loose morning wrapper, and looking lithe and graceful as a fawn. She was returning indoors from the garden, her arms laden with newly cut flowers, huge bunches of them, in brilliant bloom. Passing on into the studio, the door of which opened on the lawn, she set about making her trophies into bouquets and sprays and arranging these in certain antique brass bowls and vases of which she was an enthusiastic collector.

Jacques would fain have beaten a retreat

without further invasion of the privacies, when suddenly Djinn barked a lusty welcome. Odile lifted her head and caught sight of the solicitous "intruder," who looked partly abashed at being caught trespassing, but wholly good-humored, so that he waved his hat gaily, as if minded to give three cheers.

"Up already?" said he in the delighted tones of the family doctor, whose treatment is succeeding beyond belief.

"Of course I am," said she.

"And—may I come in, please?"

"No, Monsieur."

It tickled him to be thus "monsieured."

"Well, a little later, then," he laughed. "When I am coming back this way?"

"Perhaps," was the teasing reply.

As a matter of fact, when Jacques did return about ten o'clock he found her still in the studio, seated at an easel, and absorbed in painting—a task she had not attempted for over a month. Indeed, she had not so much as set foot inside the studio during that period. Better pleased than ever, he expressed his frankest congratulations on her zeal. In reply to which she explained that she was "in training" for St. Odile's.

"There will be plenty of views to paint and sketches to make up there, I'm sure," she said.

"You will find the landscapes splendid," he replied.

"It is settled, then, that we start next week, all four of us?"

"Quite settled."

"And what kind of views are they there—cheerful or somber ones?"

"It depends very much on the eyes you see them with. In nature-study 'we receive but what we give,' you know. Nature is beautiful everywhere—it all depends on how you see her, and the people you see her with."

"How does she strike you when you see her with me?" asked Odile, turning artfully innocent big blue eyes upon him.

His apt reply need not be recorded here.

Not many evenings later the four left Paris for the frontier by the night mail from the Gare de l'Est. The journey was a joy from start to finish, and tended to establish the truth of a slight variant of Jacques' dictum concerning landscapes, "All *journeys* are pleasant, if you know whom to make them with." Even the greatest journey of all, prolonged "through life's long day and death's dark night," is not too hard when there are loving hands to help one over the difficulties of the road. Odile saw everything through her lover's eyes, and felt at

home no matter where while he was by her side.

After a few hours of sleep, they were aroused at Saint-Dié next morning, and there left the French train. Jacques engaged a private conveyance, drawn by six post-horses, and in this, about ten o'clock of a seasonably glorious August morning, they crossed the neck of Mont Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines. The four of them had all the scenery to themselves during the long ascent as far as the frontier, not even one British or American tourist putting in an appearance on the road. All was silence around them. Only the gentle murmur of the tiny mountain streams throbbed rhythmically in the stillness, as they gushed out of the rock and rippled around the red sandstone bowlders with which the road was embanked. Surely nowhere on earth can there be found mountain springs so fresh and limpid as those having their source in the Vosges!

The blue outlines of the famous Alsatian range now stood out clearly before them, running directly north and south. The great peaks seemed like monstrous fortifications, evoked in some giant's dream, with somber buttresses thrown out at intervals into the vast green plains beneath. Jacques singled out one peak for his companions' notice amid the tre-

mendous masses of dark verdure confronting them. It was yet darker than the rest, and stood midway between Barr and Obermal. Forming a sort of projecting spur, its summit rose stark and clear from the lofty, pine-clad slopes. This was the Odilienberg, or Mont Saint-Odile. Yonder crest, as Jacques informed them, was crowned by the medieval convent enshrining the tomb that was the goal of their hopeful pilgrimage. The mountain itself, he added, was surrounded, about halfway up, by a great stone wall of barbaric origin, well known to antiquarians. Built by uncouth hands at the dawn of the Christian era out of shapeless bowlders and smaller fragments of rock, this remarkable barrier extends at the present day full eighteen miles, all around the higher slopes of the Odilienberg.

Knowing the Vosges so well, after his lengthy expeditions among them during two successive years, Jacques detailed to the ladies the general lay of the land into which they now were entering. Alsace, of course, did not as yet and at that particular point in their journey unfold before their eyes the quite peerless panorama that was to greet them on the morrow, when they stood on the convent terrace. But even so, the view had great beauties of its own. So far as the eye could reach the great forests rolled on like billows in a dark green

ocean waste. When the wind sprang up and played amid the tree-tops, long, soughing wails arose on every hand, making fitful moanings around the ruined ancient strongholds still perched on the mountain side, like deserted eyries. These grisly relics of a feudal past might also be likened to so many towering mastheads of huge galleons long submerged in the storm and stress of the years, their naked spars still showing, cruel in their gauntness—the abodes of ghosts or of ghostly memories.

"This scenery is crushing me," sighed Odile.

"That is because you do not understand it yet," replied Jacques. "But my only real fear is, and always has been from the very beginning, that you may get to like the place too well in the course of a day or two. We shall not meet any society folk here, by the way. With the rarest possible exceptions, the fashionable people care little or nothing for the austere and deeply religious character of Alsatian scenery. Luckily for ourselves, they prefer Switzerland!"

Going down the other side of Mont Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines at the full speed of their chaise and six, they speedily reached the little town at the foot, which lends the mountain its name. After hasty luncheon, they took the German train, and reached Obernai, *via*

Schlettstadt, about six o'clock in the evening. There they found awaiting them a carriage secured in advance by Jacques—the last wheeled conveyance to be used on their journey. It was to carry them up the mountain, to the very door of St. Odile's.

Jacques' thoughtful affection had forestalled his three companions in all that concerned the comfort of their actual installation as boarders in the mountain convent. The Reverend Mother—or, in the kindly Alsatian phrase, the "Frau Mutter"—had received a letter from him a week before, explaining exactly how matters stood, and requesting her to allot the ladies a bright and cheerful suite of cosy rooms. As they now passed through the town, Jacques had the satisfaction of ascertaining, by a message the Frau Mutter had left for him with the livery-stable keeper employed by the convent, that all his wishes had been most gladly and amply complied with. He imparted this news to the others, and so they began the ascent in an easy frame of mind.

The uphill journey commenced slowly, after a steady jog-trot along the level stretch of road just outside Obernai. Then the horses were headed abruptly into the forest, to emerge among a number of isolated saw-mills, looming blackly in the twilight against the white foam

"A little nun appeared on the threshold, carrying a lighted lantern in her hand."—*Page* 444

and spray churned up in the mill-pools beneath.

Soon night came down the mountain—a night of deep silence and boding mystery, with just so much "dim religious light" in the heavens as showed glimpses of sky here and there amid the towering tree-trunks, like stained-glass faintly beheld through rows of cathedral columns. The four friends now held their peace, for the whispered voices of Nature grew too sweet to remain unheeded. The mighty sound of waterfalls uprose from the deep ravines below. The dark glamour of the mountain-track grew eerily upon them as the moments sped. They would scarce have been surprised had they encountered, at some bend in the winding road, the wraith of an ancient Druidical bard, contemplating their peaceful invasion with unresentful eyes.

The higher they went, the duller grew sounds of earth from the plain beneath. At length these became so hushed that they seemed leagues and leagues away. From time to time the travelers' ears could distinguish what sounded like a stifled moan from the distant saw-mills, incredibly unreal in the stillness. Or perhaps a startled hawk whirred near the carriage windows. All else was silence. Indeed, were it not for the grinding of the wheels on

the causeway, they might deem themselves transported to some kingdom of perfect peace, not far removed from the confines of Everlasting Rest. Here and there on the majestic sweep of the mountainside certain luckless trees stood out from the rest, all wind-stripped and storm-rent, their misshapen forms seeming to writhe and crouch in voiceless agony. Far down in the vales faint glimmers of light still showed where hamlets lay, till a turn in the road brought curfew even for these, and all was velvet darkness. Our pilgrims for a space had eyes that saw not, and ears that did not hear, and felt thrilled with a strange sense of closest communion—immediate, to all seeming, and wholly spiritual—with nature and nature's God.

The upward journey lasted three long hours. The horses knew their business, and safely hauled the carriage—a wretched, ramshackle vehicle, to say truth—up a road now hugging the pine-clumps, now grazing the rocky steeps, now skirting the rims of abysses where the tops of tall firs and larches waved fifty feet below. Toiling thus slowly upward in the dark, the horses at length drew clear of the pines and emerged by the pagan wall under the clear, cold starlight. The travelers were now actually on the crest of the Odilienberg, at a point to the

left of the Holtzplatz. By dint of peering into the void they could distinguish the Rossberg woods, the Hohwald forest, and the terrific prominence known as the Mennelstein, while far below the small village of Saint Nabord and the vast Alsatian plain lay slumbering in the night.

The horses could now gallop freely along the level plateau. The air was keen and pure, as always in such altitudes. Jacques wrapped up Odile more carefully.

"Is there any difference as yet," he said, "in your impressions of the Vosges? But I expect you have hardly had time enough to-night to form a proper opinion."

"I have the oddest feeling about them," she said. "The red rocks and the dark foliage of the pines, and the glimpses we have had of the mountain-tops, reveal God to me in quite a new light. He seems so great, so grand and majestic to-night that I am almost afraid of Him!"

"You need not be afraid," said Jacques, reassuringly, "nor would you be, if you only knew how gracious God is to those seeking His aid in this place."

In another quarter of an hour they had reached and passed between two enormous rocks that might have been the gate-posts of a

giant's castle. A little farther and they came to a building of modern construction, standing out from others far older than itself. The unimposing, rustic front suggested a farm-house rather than a religious edifice. It was built upon the summit of a huge cairn of bowlders far more inspiring alike in size and in general impressiveness than any they had as yet encountered.

They were now at their journey's end.

At the sound of carriage-wheels in the courtyard a door was opened in one of the ancient buildings constituting the convent proper, and a little nun appeared on the threshold, wearing wooden shoes and carrying a lighted lantern in her hand. Although shy with Jacques, when she came forward to greet the new guests, she was so exquisitely kind and attentive to the ladies, so swift and correct in her intuition as to which of them was the fiancée of the tall young man now silently effacing himself in their wake—as though his task were now done and his further intervention not needed—that Odile, in her heart of hearts, was disposed to take alarm.

"Jacques has done much more," she thought, "than merely arrange for my comfortable reception here. Doubtless he is treating me as his lady-love, but also as his patient. Who

knows but I may be far worse than he cares to let me know?"

The result of this was a sort of reaction, during which the girl's unpleasant first impression took good hold of her mind, and seemed indeed to be justified by attendant circumstances. For example, Sister Bernard was for making all three of them drink hot milk, and when Jeanne and Aunt Bertha preferred tea, gave way to them, but insisted on hot milk for Odile. Later on she conducted them to their rooms, through long, resounding corridors, where the beat of their footfalls on the well-worn pitch-pine floor awakened hollow echoes at every turn. Odile was feeling none too cheerful, and her kindly guide must have noted it.

"You will see," said the little Sister, speaking French with charming difficulty, "you will see how much better you will like this place to-morrow. I shall say my rosary for you to-night, to have fine weather, and the good, healthy scent of the pines all the time you are here. Mind you ring for me if there is anything you want. I shall be only too glad to get it for you."

"And what is your name, Sister?" asked Odile.

"Sister Bernard," was the reply. "'Little Sister Bernard,' they generally call me."

Odile looked at her. The young nun's face showed kindness and great refinement, but an unspoken question seemed to lurk in the bright eyes—the eyes of one accustomed to big, open spaces. Odile made haste to reply to it.

"My name," she said, "is Odile."

"Odile!" exclaimed the little Sister, clasping her hands. "The loveliest name of all Alsace! I think your holy patron saint will be obliged to grant you everything here!"

Everything. Odile was quick to note that word.

"Will you say a prayer to her for me, Sister?" she said.

"I promise you," said the kind little nun.

So saying, she withdrew for the night, leaving behind her in the modest cell allotted to Odile not only the glad memory of her radiant gaze and sweet and nun-like smile, but also a certain uneasiness and alarm—the outcome, perhaps, of an ill-dissimulated zeal to do her best in a dubious case.

Next morning, however, there was reason to believe that little Sister Bernard stood well in the esteem of Heaven and St. Odile, for everything gave promise of a glorious day. A marvelous mist lay low on the mountainside, far beneath the convent terrace, and filling all

the valleys. Perhaps a little perversely, this weather-sign always means a grand day on the Odilienberg itself.

To those looking down upon it in the morning sun, the mist seemed like a sea of silver, in whose glittering depths all else was effaced—mountains and villages and plain and all. The sun was darting myriads of flame-tipped arrows into every part of the white, cloud-like mass, to dispel the mist-wreaths and draw them into the warm regions of the upper air, that so he might win his way to the valleys themselves at length, and cheer them also with his light and heat. It was a wonderful sight of nature in her strength, and the sheer brilliance of it proved dazzling to Odile when she opened her little green shutters. Jeanne came into her bedroom presently, and the two girls sat down by the open window, with its view of the boundless cloud-realms beneath, and fell to chatting open-heartedly together like sisters.

"I don't know," said Odile in the course of talk, "but it has seemed to me ever since yesterday that God has plans for me I know nothing about as yet, and that He is getting me ready to fulfil them. There is a great deal at work inside me—mysterious, irresistible influences, all leading on to some future that rather fright-

ens me. Just imagine, Jeanne, only a fortnight ago I was terrified at the thought of death. And now this very night I found myself getting used to it, and thinking about it without being much afraid. I shall go more deeply into myself—I shall be quite honest with myself—in fact I shall try to get to the very bottom of what seems to be ordained for me—so that I now seem to be actually desiring it. Now, you know God never rubs out but to write afresh; He never uproots but to sow the ground anew. I am inclined to think that He is now making me ready for His coming—that He is acting toward me like a kind father, or exquisitely tactful friend, and accustoming me—or helping me to try to get accustomed—to the thought of separation."

"My dear girl," said Jeanne, the matter-of-fact, "you must have spent a very bad night."

"Not at all," said Odile.

"Then you mustn't talk like that!"

"Why?" asked Odile, quite simply.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Jeanne with some asperity. "Surely there is my brother to be considered!"

"I love him more than ever, but also better than ever."

"For the life of me I cannot see the distinction you draw."

"While Odile painted, Jacques hovered around her like a flying sentry . . . "—*Page* 455

"That is because you are in splendid bodily health, Jeanne. You have, so to speak, a perfect grip on life, and a firm stand in the middle of the road, whereas I am at the far end of it, and slipping down—down. I can feel the branch giving that I am clinging to—and clinging to I hardly know why."

Jeanne did not speak, but the big tears welled in her eyes as she turned from Odile and looked out on the far horizon.

"Don't you think," went on Odile, pursuing her own line of thought, "that life is such a little thing after all—just a speck between two eternities?"

"Odile!" sobbed poor Jeanne. "If you only knew what pain you give me when you talk like that!"

"But Jeanne, dear, it is the very first time——"

"Let it be the last time, too," said Jeanne with a note of finality. Then, tenderly putting back Odile's fair hair from her brows, she kissed her forehead with an affection and emotion she took no trouble to conceal.

"Promise me you will never, never talk like that again," she said. "Drive away these black goblins for ever and a day."

The normally undemonstrative Jeanne, who had a theory that most sentiment was bad for

the nerves, then briskly changed to a much more mundane topic.

"Jacques is down in the refectory, you know," she said, "waiting for us, and pining for his breakfast."

So they went downstairs—where they found Aunt Bertha very deep in conversation with little Sister Bernard—and sat down with Jacques to a dainty breakfast, the menu of which showed beyond the shadow of doubt that the Squire's strong influence on their behalf extended to commissariat matters as well as to everything else in the place. Indeed, if further proofs of this were needed they were abundantly forthcoming in the course of the next few days. The casual pilgrims and even the more regular summer boarders at St. Odile's are in the habit of taking their meals democratically together in the big common refectory, sitting precisely where they please. Sister Bernard, however, had installed "her friends"—as she already called them—in a snug parlor adjoining the chaplain's quarters, a small apartment of some modest state, reserved as a rule for the Bishop of Strasburg, on his Lordship's occasional visits of devotion or duty to the Convent of Sainte-Odile.

Like so many good Reverend Mothers, who spend their lives endeavoring to conceal tender

hearts under a business-like exterior, the Frau Mutter had raised objections at first, but little Sister Bernard was not an Alsatian in vain. She held to her point tenaciously. Here was a case for true charity, she pleaded—a sick young lady coming from ever so far away to pray for the restoration of her health in particularly touching circumstances; whereas the general run of the other convent boarders consisted of well-to-do tradesmen and their robustly healthy wives from no farther than Strasburg, Colmar, and Haguenau, who neither asked nor expected the thoughtful care which means so much to an invalid.

As a result the Frau Mutter, in the goodness of her heart, surrendered. Sister Bernard not only had her way, but a free hand with it. Indeed, it was truly *con amore* that the little nun waited on the Vale of Api pilgrims—waited on them and catered for them, too. In place of the classic sauerkraut and other standard dishes of the Fatherland, all floating in sauces unknown to fame, Sister Bernard, while keeping to the viands the province provided—had everything beautifully cooked and served. New milk and cream for Odile's especial benefit were daily procured from the Hohwald forester's cows, and honey was brought up from Saint-Nabord, the tiny village at the foot of the

mountain, which appears to observers on the convent terrace like a group of toy houses on the verge of an illimitable green tablecloth. Nay, more, Sister Bernard discovered in some nook of the convent cellar certain bottles of rare old vintage claret, there forgotten since none in the Community knew when.

"You must it drink right up!" she said to Odile in her engaging half-German dialect. "Already far too old it is!"

With these words she would pour out the flashing wine into the plain glasses on the table, where its filmy beeswing proclaimed it worthy to be quaffed by the burgraves of old, in their costly, chased silver beakers. Yet, odd as it may sound to connoisseurs, it was more to oblige Sister Bernard than anything else that Odile consented to sip it.

They had not been three days at the convent ere not only Odile, but all four of them, fell completely under the home-like spell of their new surroundings. The historic foundation on the Odilienberg crest, indeed, abounds in every charm that can make appeal to thoughtful and religious minds, especially at the graver moments of life. One's immediate environment is quiet and kindly; an immemorially ancient chapel nestles snugly in the rock, as though

better to foster there its holy memories; the sights of nature are ruggedly sublime; the spring which has its source there is famed in even that land of limpid mountain streams, and the very position of the hospice itself is perhaps unique in the whole world. Our travelers spent hours at a time on the part of the convent terrace reserved for guests or among the crags on the Mennelstein, as the actual peak of the Odilienberg is named. On one side this promontory descends sheer to the great Alsatian plain, of which it affords a sweeping bird's-eye view. From the Mennelstein one may see two hundred villages, scattered far and near, the spire of Strasburg, the ruins of Landsberg, Barr, the Castle of Andlau, and finally the Black Forest mountains, rising clear of the woods from which they take their name, and showing bright or darkling as the weather varies or the sun moves onward in his course.

As a crowning if negative charm, there is not a hotel in the place! Mere tourists and wandering sightseers hardly ever ascend the mountainside. From time to time a local pilgrimage is organized and mounts the Odilienberg first thing in the morning, entirely on devotion bent—the grave and silent devotion so typical of Catholic Alsace. The pilgrims proceed quietly homeward about ten o'clock, after

saying their prayers and partaking of the hospitable fare provided for them in the portress's lodge. The boarders at any given period in the summer months consist of some half-score pious families from Strasburg and other adjacent towns, whose sober provincial garb and demeanor sort well with the general unworldly surroundings.

Odile soon took to painting in the open once again. Jacques passed no comment, but thought all the more for saying nothing—and his thoughts were decidedly agreeable ones. His fiancée's return, or, as it might well be termed, her "resurrection" to normal life, marked whole epochs of progress since the dismal afternoon many weeks before when she had bunched her brushes together in his presence quite tranquilly and despondently, with the words, "I have painted my very last picture!" Certes, she had changed her mind since then, for she now never made her appearance at the breakfast table without bringing her paint-box with her, and giving at least one glance to see that no color-tubes needed replacing. Breakfast over, her first care was to replenish her water vials and then she was free to accompany Jacques in quest of attractive "bits" of nature.

In the matter of these last there was—as

there is—and be it hoped always will be—a positive embarrassment of riches on the high slopes of the Odilienberg. Wild nature is utterly unspoiled there by so much as one flaring modern caravansary, and the sole dwellers in a solitude that is truly picturesque are well in keeping with the picture itself, being all of them earnest lovers of God's wondrous works in nature. The beetling red sandstone cliffs, bearing names coming down from Druidical days, the gloomy thickets of the Hohwald, the feudal strongholds left dismantled since the time of the Thirty Years' War, the Serva Cavern, the Deserter's Grotto, the Field of Fire, the foresters' dwellings in the woods, the lonely sawmills at the feet of roaring cataracts—all these, and much else, cried aloud for Odile's brush. She soon made a definite choice, however, and set to work at a point on the Mennelstein track, affording a clear view of the convent on its cairn, and of the almost precipitous drop of the cliffs to the level of the plain, eight hundred meters beneath.

While Odile painted, Jacques hovered around her like a flying sentry, with the keenest of eyes for new scenes worth the painting and also—why conceal it?—for the varying aspects of the fair artist herself at her work. At

times Odile would *feel* that she was thus being looked at—would be telepathically made aware, as it were, that a pair of protecting eyes was lovingly turned upon her. And then, sure enough, as she turned on her camp-stool she was bound to encounter Jacques' manful, affectionate regard, from where he stood on some rock or lay at ease amid the fragrant, rustling heather. She certainly made a most delightful picture against the severely simple background —the somber foliage of the pines and the dread summits of the mighty Vosges, looking down upon vales so tranquil that one might fondly imagine the primal simplicity of Eden had never entirely abandoned them. From time to time, however, Jacques made it his care to prevent Odile from working too hard, and effected a diversion by sitting beside her and chatting discursively. The historical topics suggested by the panorama at their feet were endless and deeply interesting. Every mountain in sight, every forest and valley and village, every watercourse and ruined castle, had its own particular tale, as narrated in legend or in the sober pages of history. The whole view was a vivid and literally "life-size" historical map, on which even the smallest details most amply rewarded attention.

Then at night-fall, when the young couple

hied them convent-ward, after a lengthy talk about the days of old, Odile was apt to turn smilingly to Jacques, when the wind sobbed in the pines overhead, and remark that the souls of all the long-departed Merovingian warriors seemed clustering around them, to eavesdrop in the dark.

"Perhaps they are," replied Jacques on one such occasion. "But why drag *them* in? Surely St. Odile's soul—the soul of your holy patron—is far nearer to us than all of them, for we love her and have come here to implore her aid."

Still, the young man's mind was richly stored with historical and legendary lore of every description, which he freely imparted to Odile. Low down on the horizon, for example, and to the left of their customary vantage-point, there is a view of two dilapidated but still venerable masses of reddish masonry, which Alsatians call "The Two-Brothers Castle." Jacques told Odile the tale of this, which is brief and grim, as well as highly dramatic. According to tradition, the place was the stronghold of two lords who were brethren, and dwelt there together in unity. Now one of them was an early riser, and was wont to awaken his brother every morning by shooting an arrow across the courtyard at the heavy closed oaken shutters on the casement of the sleeper's room. One

morning the tardier brother awoke of himself. Deeming that the accustomed signal had been made, but that he had overslept himself, not heeding it, he began to open his casement, but at that very moment his brother's arrow came speeding through the cleft, as the oaken shutters parted, and pierced the hapless warrior through the brain.

Beyond the Two-Brothers Castle lies Andlau, still owned by the lineal descendants of its ancient lords. Far away across country on the right, and overlooking the town of Schletstadt, is the formidable old stronghold named the Hohkoenigsburg. Few fortresses erected by mortal man have ever beheld more fighting around their walls. The Hohkoenigsburg belonged successively to the Dukes of Lorraine, to the Landgraves of Lower Alsace, to the Bishops of Strasburg, and to a notorious band of brigands, who found in it an extremely convenient headquarters, whence to command the course of two main roads, and terrorize all the valley, from Cherweiler down to Sainte-Marie. Contingents of men-at-arms were furnished by the towns of Strasburg, Colmar, and Schletstadt, and the castle was captured in time by the friends of law and order, only to be furiously retaken by the brigands, and occupied by them once more. It needed the united

efforts of the Bishop of Strasburg, the Seigneur of Ribeaupierre, and the Archduke Sigismund of Austria, with all the forces at their disposal, to carry the place by storm, after fearful carnage on both sides, so all but impregnable was it while modern artillery yet lay in the lap of the future. After this episode in its blood-stained annals, the Hohkoenigsburg became a fief of the House of Austria. As such it underwent an appalling siege in 1633, during the Thirty Years' War, but had to surrender to the Swedish forces at length, in spite of its heroic defence by Philip of Lichtenau.

From that day to this the Hohkoenigsburg has remained a huge, impressive ruin, perhaps the finest of its kind in Alsace. Lordly trees now grow between its shattered towers, and thrust their branches against the crumbling battlements, like giant warders scanning the plain below.

"Do you know, Odile," said Jacques, "yonder weird old castle could tell many a tale if it would. Doesn't it look for all the world like the picture of a giant's den from a fairy-book?"

"We must pay it a visit," said Odile.

"Yes, after we have seen the Hagelschloss, which I want to show you first."

Thus it was that the two lovers, while wan-

dering in the enchanted gardens of the past, forgot to worry about the present and future. Odile seemed well and cheerful, and Jacques permitted himself no thoughts about the leather factories or the possible schemings of the male contingent of the Harmmsters, and Soupot, and—Alberta. Sufficient for him that his bride-elect and he were side by side together in the midst of the wild nature they loved, well content to be steeped in nature's sights and sounds and fragrances, and grateful, too, for the forgetfulness of the outer world, which she daily instilled into their souls.

At the same time Jacques was not altogether free from uneasiness on Odile's account. She occasionally dropped words in the course of conversation which revealed to him a strange frame of mind, at which he jested, indeed, but with the kind of mirth that is perilously akin to tears.

One morning Odile was so late for breakfast that he set out in quest of her, and found her kneeling in fervent prayer at the tomb of her patron saint. She was pressing her brows against the rude stone carvings at the foot of the ancient shrine, and without knowing why Jacques was seized with a sudden foreboding that the prayer she uttered was one con-

trary to all his hopes. He had somehow had a vague presentiment of this when entering the chapel first, but had done his best to put it aside. Even now he allowed no sign of apprehension to escape him as he gently laid his hand on Odile's shoulder, to remind her of the flight of time.

"I hope, Odile," he whispered, "that you are praying well this morning?"

She started slightly, and then turned toward him.

"Good-morning, Jacques," she said.

"Were any of those prayers for me?" he asked.

"They were *all* for you," she replied, in the low tones of one who has been suddenly called aside from an engrossing conversation of the deepest import.

"But surely you said one little prayer for yourself as well?"

"No, not one."

"Why not? It is on *your* account we are all of us here, you know! Still, after all, it is true enough that your own life and mine are now so inextricably blended together that to pray for one of us means praying for the other, too."

"Believe me, Jacques, when I assure you that I have never once prayed for my health since we have been up here."

"What possible reason could there be for *that?* Our only motive in coming to St. Odile's was the restoration of your health. I am wholly at a loss to understand your meaning."

"The reason is this, that all my rebellious feelings have vanished one after the other. Little by little I am beginning to see the way clearer before me. I know now how right the Abbé Hans was. God does His work well, but we do not understand Him till we have journeyed over all the windings of the road by which it is His wisdom to lead us. You believe all that, do you not?"

Jacques simply stared fixedly at her in dismay from where he stood with his back to the low chapel door. She encountered his gaze with modest firmness, being fully convinced that now and henceforward no shadow of mutual misunderstanding should be allowed to come between them. She could see that he was appalled by the blow. Indeed, he accepted it for what it was—the beginning of the end of all his hopes. Yes, all was over between them now, for the maiden of his heart no longer desired to live. Undaunted as he was by nature, his cheek blanched, and he suddenly fell on his knees, as though forced into the attitude of prayer by a terrible, crushing load pressed down on shoulders not ready to receive it.

There were no other worshippers present in the little, home-like chapel. Odile came close to the poor, stricken man.

"Jacques," she said, "understand me properly. If Almighty God is willing that you and I should come together in marriage, I am indeed willing also. But if He refuses our wish, I no longer repine. I can say to Him in all sincerity from the depths of my heart, 'O Lord, I do not understand well yet, but I know in part . . . I know in part. May Thy most holy will be done!' Jacques, will you say that prayer with me?—yes, Jacques, dear, do, because you are still my betrothed in the eyes of God. I shall become your own true wife the moment God permits. But if He should never allow us to be united in this miserable world, answer me, dear—you will bow down beside me, will you not, in submission to God's holy will?"

"I will," he replied in broken tones. "I will do whatever you wish, and whatever God ordains."

"I want to lead you to Him, Jacques."

"Yet you are leaving me alone behind you in this world."

"How can I ever leave you alone, dear heart? Oh, never say those words again! Surely nothing can put asunder what God has joined to-

gether. Jacques, I love you far better than ever and more than ever, too. Our trysting-place shall be the Heart of God—the Heart of pure, undying Love. Yes, there let us bide our tryst, in the bosom of Almighty God, Who is loth that we should dally on the way to Him, and so is raising our earthly love to heights of heavenly hope. Our nuptials are deferred, it may be, but only that our love may grow more purely beautiful. My soul will be freed from the prison-house of the body and the weaknesses of poor, frail, human nature, that it may the better guide yours on high to the true land of the leal, where only can it be said with truth that we love 'for ever and ever.' And that hour of death, which to so many others is terrible indeed, shall be to us the gateway of bliss, the blessed hour of meeting, never more to part, the fulfillment of all highest ideals, to be enjoyed throughout eternity. Is not that beautiful, Jacques? How God must love His poor creatures, to wish to lead them to such heights as these! And now please tell me that you will never again rebel?"

"I shall bear my pain without murmuring."

"To receive our suffering at God's hands, and to endure it for His sake, is the sublimest and happiest lot on earth."

"Jacques more than once scanned the horizon . . . and seemed concerned."—*Page* 467

They continued their whispered converse a little longer, kneeling side by side in one of the oaken stalls.

"At any rate," said Jacques, brushing tears from his eyes as he spoke, "we must keep this matter entirely between ourselves."

"Of course," replied Odile, "who else could understand it as we now do? Only those who have suffered intensely, then learned to read their sorrows in the light of the Gospel, can find anything good and desirable in what others consider appalling, because of the havoc that pain must wreak in all purely earthly attachments. But as for me, I am now almost in a hurry for the worst to be very soon over. I shall never be closer to you, Jacques, than when to the eyes of the world I shall have disappeared forever."

As they left the chapel, she smiled at him rather wistfully.

"You are pale, dear friend," she said. "I am afraid that your face will tell tales. You must bear up—believe me, you must."

"I am only a novice in the school of suffering as yet," he replied. "But God is speeding His work in me.

"Ah!" he continued, putting a hand on his breast, "I feel as if I were choking! Odile, Odile, I did not think it possible that a man

could endure such pain and still continue to live!"

They rejoined the others, and succeeded in maintaining a composed demeanor at the breakfast table, so that even Jeanne's quick perceptions were for once at fault. When the meal was over, Odile busied herself with the tin case containing her water-colors, and Jacques left the room in quest of her sketch-books.

They had made arrangements that morning for a short excursion to the Hagelschloss, a grim old castle which, like the Hohkoenigsburg, once served as a brigands' keep. It lies down in a deep valley rather less than three miles from the convent. In order to spare Odile as much fatigue as possible, Jacques gladly accepted the loan of the chaplain's donkey-car, which the reverend owner very kindly placed at his disposal, on the suggestion, be it whispered, of good-natured little Sister Bernard. Odile protested, on the ground that she felt remarkably well, and that a trudge among the pines would do her no end of good. But Jacques insisted on having his way, with rather more than his usual pertinacity, and made it his care to pack the car with enough rugs and wrappers for an Arctic expedition.

And so they started, all four of them, with

every outward semblance, on the ladies' part, of being in the highest and liveliest spirits. Jeanne, in particular, extracted considerable amusement from the plight to which her brother, the gallant Vale of Api rider, was reduced in being compelled to drive and humor a sedate but determined little ass of what grammarians ungallantly term the inferior gender.

Odile was decidedly "in form," as the saying goes, and kept up a flow of pleasant conversation more or less concerned with the petty incidents of the journey, and headed the talk in the right direction whenever it threatened to turn upon graver topics. Jacques found it impossible to emulate her example in this respect, with the result that she did her best to spur his flagging interest in the minor joys of life—perhaps over-eagerly, and because she did not like to think him so much weaker than herself. But Jacques was slow to be thus rallied into cheerfulness. Perhaps the weather was against him, too. The morning was close and heavy, and altogether, as may well be imagined, he was not feeling himself by any manner of means.

The atmosphere grew more and more oppressive as they descended the winding road along the mountainside. Jacques more than

once scanned the horizon—now perceptibly shrinking as the party came lower and lower—and seemed rather concerned by the appearance of certain clouds just barely showing their heads above the narrowing sky-line.

"You seem rather worried about something," remarked Jeanne.

"Yes," he replied. "The fact is, I am really uneasy as to whether the day is going to keep fine."

"Surely the weather will hold up with a clear sky, so intensely blue as that?"

"There would be no question about it in the Vale of Api, but the conditions are very different up here in the mountains, especially on this one—the Odilienberg."

"Let us hope it will keep fine till late in the afternoon," said Jeanne.

Just then they chanced to encounter a forest guard in his "Schlitt" or sleigh, and carrying a rifle slung over his gray uniform jacket.

"Are we going to have a storm?" Jacques inquired.

"To-night, perhaps, sir," replied the man of much weather-lore.

"But not before, you think? Not this morning, at any rate?"

"Oh, surely not," said the other, and went his way, leaving the party comforted by his

reassuring forecast, and glad to pursue their journey to the Hagelschloss.

As the cart jogged farther in its cautious progress down the lower slopes, Jacques told his companions how twice in his boyhood he had set out to find the Hagelschloss, low-lying in its mysterious ravine, and on each occasion had lost his way in the woods and been baffled in his quest. The whole place seemed mystery-laden, he said; all in it and about it was weird and wild, from the sheer hideousness of its site and the dark enigma of its origin, to the dread deeds of which it was the scene, and the strange difficulties besetting all approach to it. "And indeed it is so disagreeable a ruin," Jacques frankly confessed, "that it isn't worth more than just one trip this morning, to get it off our minds, so to speak, and have an excuse for an outing."

They had now left the fairly broad mountain road and were making their way through the pines by narrow forest paths, scarce wide enough for the wheels of the little cart. Nor had they proceeded any considerable distance before the track took so steep a downward dip that Jacques thought it well to leave donkey and cart in charge of a wood-cutter working near at hand, and to conduct his little caravan on foot down what appeared an enormous fun-

nel hollowed out in the mountainside. His sister, with a bluntness of expression that Dante himself might have admired, propounded a remarkable question:

"Are you taking us down to hell?" she asked sweetly.

The appalling reflection on the scenery thus forcefully implied was by no means lost on Jacques.

"I think we had better go no farther," he said. "After all, the Hagelschloss itself—the actual building, I mean—is not so very different from any of the other old castles round about St. Odile's. It is only the site and surroundings which have a certain strange, wild beauty all their own, and you can have a good look at *them* here and now without going any farther."

"But then we have hardly any farther to go!" put in Odile.

"Would you like to go on?"

"Yes, very much."

"Come along, then," said Jacques, proceeding down the ravine.

The closely set pines now hid the sky from view. Yet to Jacques' experienced eyes the sylvan twilight seemed much darker than it should be.

"I hope that forester was right in his opin-

ion," he said. "Surely we are in for a storm on the Odilienberg. The Hagelschloss is always dark, but I have never seen it look so dead black as it does to-day."

"I can't see anything at all," laughed Odile.

"Why, *there* is the Hagelschloss," said Jacques; "deep down there, right in front of you!"

Peering hard in the direction indicated, Odile made out a huge mass of dark red masonry, half hidden by a rise in the ground. It was the grim outer wall of the old stronghold, which could be descried lying farther back, at a good distance from this, its former first line of defense, and looming so ugly and so red—what with the hue of the sandstone and the crimson rust of the countless grated windows—that positively it afforded some excuse for Jeanne's strong language, which likened it to a blowhole —or shall we say a ventilating shaft?—of the infernal regions themselves.

"I vote we go no farther," said Jacques a second time.

But the girls again protested, this time on the ground that it was cooler and shadier where they were than under the broiling sunshine on the upper road.

"It may not 'broil' so fiercely as you imagine," said Jacques. "Shall I tell you what I

really think? In spite of what the forester said, I feel almost certain we are going to have a storm. It would be simply dreadful if we were caught out in it at the bottom of this funnel-shaped ravine."

He had hardly spoken the words when there came an ominous clap of thunder, sounding distant at first, but soon deepening into a peal, rumbling nearer and nearer, and awakening titanic echoes among the mountain tops. And hardly had the final sullen growlings died away ere a second peal resounded, and then a third, each louder and more sinister than the last. Odile was trembling. Except for an ice-cold breeze which had begun to blow up, all nature seemed strangely silent, in the tense, hushed calm that heralds a summer storm in the Vosges.

Jacques hastily took counsel with himself as to the best course to adopt. The first great drops of rain were already splashing down, and the scant shelter of the pines was worse than none at all. The toilsome reascent of the ravine would afford Odile no better protection from the deluge impending than a woodcutter's tumbledown tool-shed—the merest shanty of pine boards, half open to the weather. There was no time to lose, for the rain was now pouring in torrents. He determined, therefore, to

push onward and downward and take cover in the dismantled but still weather-proof ruins of the old Hagelschloss itself.

"Can you manage without my help?" he asked his sister, after hastily communicating his plans.

"I shall be all right," she replied. "Don't worry. Look after Odile."

"Very well; follow us as best you can, and I shall make for a point in the ruins where there will be good dry cover for all three of us."

Without more ado, he picked up Odile in his arms as if she were a baby—and indeed she was scarce a heavier burden. Then, shielding her against his breast from the sudden fury of the storm, he bore her with swift, sure-footed strides down the steep incline, amid the lurid play of the lightning and the pelting showers of commingled rain and hail. Soon the ground grew slippery underfoot, and he had to fare more cautiously, and meanwhile to endure with what patience he might the constant buffeting of the swaying pine boughs obstructing his path.

"Press your face against my coat, Odile," he cried. "Don't look up! We shall be there very soon!"

Half blinded by the ceaseless downpour, he had difficulty at first in seeing what had be-

come of his sister. Presently he caught sight of her a dozen paces distant, holding her arm before her face to fend off scratches from the tangled pine branches and pluckily pursuing a way of her own along the unpleasant downward journey.

After fording, knee-deep, the narrow mountain torrent that brawls at the bottom of the ravine, Jacques led the way to a rusted portcullis defending an ancient sally-port. Unfortunately much valuable time was here lost while an entrance was being effected, for the long disused gate at first resisted Jacques' utmost efforts. At last, however, it yielded, and they were out of the driving rain, beneath the safe shelter of the vaulted passage within. The Squire and his sister were drenched through and through, to say nothing of the state of their footgear after fording the swollen torrent. The grave mischief was that poor Odile had also received a most thorough wetting. A light shawl and a thin silk blouse are the poorest protection against such cataracts as poured from the heavens while Jacques had been forcing the portcullis from its grooves.

"It is nothing," said Odile with a brave effort at a smile, as she noted their looks of dismay.

"Worse luck, it *is* something," said Jacques very anxiously. Indeed, the girl's eyes were

already encircled by ominous dark rings and two crimson spots stood out on either cheek, in alarming contrast with the deathlike pallor of the rest of her face.

The rain continued in torrents for the best part of an hour, during which Jeanne did her utmost to save Odile from catching cold, while Jacques stalked up and down the long corridor like some caged animal, a prey to a hundred conflicting emotions. At length the downpour ceased quite suddenly, a characteristic of summer storms in the mountains. The sun broke out in undaunted splendor and greeted the flying clouds with what seemed an ironic smile, as they scudded away to regions beyond the Rhine, like so many remnants of a vanquished Armada. And very soon afterward all was serene again.

Our friends made their way up the dripping slopes to where the car awaited them, Odile much exhausted, and leaning heavily on her lover's arm. On the drive along the open road back to the convent they overtook several of their fellow-boarders, who had also been caught out in the storm. One of them—a good-humored lass from Mulhausen—had had rather a hard time of it, having found no better shelter than the meager foliage of the nearest pine.

But both she and her less well-deluged companions, with hardly an exception, made merry at their mishap, and regarded it rather in the light of something to laugh over presently in the refectory than as anything of graver moment. Jacques only was silent as he restored his charges to Sister Bernard's care. In fact, he could hardly find words in which to convey to her and to Aunt Bertha by her side some little of the anxiety he felt.

Still, Odile had now got her color back, and Aunt Bertha was not disposed to make the worst of things.

"Ah, Sister, Sister," she exclaimed to the little nun, in droll tones of self-commiseration, "don't you talk to me about young folks who are engaged to be married! In my humble opinion they positively enjoy getting themselves into mischief!"

Half an hour later the four of them were sitting down to luncheon in the Bishop's parlor. Odile had donned a pretty, light summer frock, and was chatting quite merrily with Sister Bernard. She looked so bright and bonny that even Jacques began to think his earlier fears had been much exaggerated. There was a pleasant clatter of tongues, to say nothing of knives and forks, from the refec-

tory adjoining, and the four pilgrims were not slow to emulate their neighbors' good example. Everything pointed to as quiet and home-like a meal as any they had enjoyed since coming to the mountain. Then, suddenly, the door was opened and the postman made his appearance.

"Guten Tag!" said he in jovial Alsatian gutturals, politely doffing his streaming oilskin cap, and making his best bow as he spoke.

"For blackguardly people who like this kind of weather," he added dryly, "this is just the blackguardly kind of weather that they will like. Sister, I am counting on a good plate of soup and a stiff glass of kirsch to keep the cold out!"

"It depends," said little Sister Bernard demurely.

"What does it depend on?" asked the humorist, perhaps a little alarmed.

"It depends on whether you have brought good news or not," said little Sister Bernard.

"Oh, I am sure I hope so," said the man of many letters, putting his stick in a corner and distributing the Vale of Api and Abbaye mail to Jacques and his three companions. With an eye to creature comforts, he stood waiting to be assured that the news he brought had given satisfaction, when suddenly he bethought him of an oversight.

"Ach!" he exclaimed, "I was nearly forgetting the most important thing of all!"

Then, diving into the lining of his cap, he found and produced a telegram bearing the stamp of the post-office at Obernai.

"There!" he said. "It is for Monsieur de la Ferlandière."

Jacques tore the envelope open, glanced at the brief contents, and uttered a loud exclamation. The three ladies then rose from table and stood beside him to read what follows:

From the Vale of Api, France.

Complete financial failure factories. Whole district in state of revolution. Come back tonight. Most urgent.

ABBÉ HANS.

CHAPTER XVIII

AS THE French express drew nearer and nearer to Tergnier, at the top of its speed, Jacques sat in a corner seat gazing out of the window, with almost unseeing eyes, upon a landscape gradually growing familiar. Thoughts flashed through his mind far more swiftly than the pulsation of the racing pistons in the engine ahead. How was he likely to find things in the Vale of Api? There was the question of questions, and his mind was left to

feed upon itself in anxious quest of probable—or impossible—replies.

Over and over again he pulled out the Curé's laconic telegram and tried to read new details into it. There was small comfort in this, for there was no getting away from the grim pith of the message itself. No, he felt that he was facing a big crisis—perhaps the biggest that would ever confront him in life. The very contrasts involved were as striking as they were intensely painful. There was Odile, for instance, just behind him in the train, in the sleeping-car reserved for ladies' use, rather worse in health than she had ever been before. And—no matter how much against his will—here he was now escorting her from a peaceful mountain retreat into the midst of riot, if not indeed red revolution. Possibly his own home at La Ferlandière was now flaming to the skies, to the tune of "La Carmagnole." Whereso-ever he turned his thoughts, this way or that, there seemed no outlook but one of civil war-fare at its worst in the present and then—in the very near future—the anguish of parting and the sadness of farewell.

Once the ladies determined not to remain on at St. Odile's without him, Jacques' idea had been that they should break the return jour-

ney in Paris and spend about a week there. As apart from the fact that he wanted them to be in a place of safety while he faced the dread music in the Vale alone, he had thought and said that Odile could profitably utilize the interval by consulting some humane physician of unquestioned eminence, so as to have a suitable régime mapped out for her that would tide her safely over the dangerous autumn months. The advice, perhaps, was rather inconsistent, remembering Jacques' vigorous views on the limitations of medical science, and Odile would have none of it, both on this score and also because she had now learned what had been concealed from her, viz., the grave fact that a tendency to consumption was hereditary in her family.

"Dear old Dr. Mutin will be quite good enough to look after me until the end," she told poor Jacques.

"Odile!" protested Jacques, "if you only loved me one little bit you would never talk to me like that!"

"Not love you, dear?" she replied very gently. "Ah, Jacques, if you only knew! Sometimes I think you have only the merest glimmering of the truth, the *true* truth, which is this, that under God you are all the world to me! I am far hungrier for the very sight

of you now than ever before. The whole world is a lonesome wilderness to me with you away. Yes, when you leave me it is like the darkening of a sun or the quenching of all life around me."

"Then, dearest, why is it that you seem to take a sort of pleasure in robbing me of all I now have left—my hope of better days?"

"Your hope? Let us understand what we mean by that word, dear—whether we mean by it the steadfast hope that lights the way to heaven or only its wavering reflection, that plays on the troubled waters of merely human love. Now, Jacques, my love for you was purely human once, but now I love you in God, and it is in God that I hope to be reunited to you. The consolations of faith have flooded and gladdened my heart like sunbeams piercing every nook and cranny of some poor man's darksome garret. I now *know,* and *see,* and *understand,* and—forgive me for saying it, Jacques—I am so grateful that God is taking me. Yes, dear, God granted you far, far more than what you prayed for at the tomb of St. Odile. You wanted Him to cure my body—and He has healed my soul, which was in far worse need of healing, all soured and resentful, as it was, as though the dear God were some executioner, whom the culprit might suffer to do his duty, while doubting all the while the

justice of the penalty. Thank God those dreadful days are over, gone, and gone forever. But I wish to be near you till the very end, to make the most of the dear moments still vouchsafed us. So do not leave me behind in Paris, Jacques. I should be ever so sad and lonely there, and you know Paris is the last place in the world for the lonely and the sorrowful."

"But suppose there is real ugly mischief afoot in the Vale of Api?" asked Jacques with worried eyes. "What I mean is this. We know from the telegram that there is serious trouble, but suppose there should be bad work—a popular uprising, say, with the Abbaye and La Ferlandière marked down by the mob as their principal points of attack? You know we must expect anything and everything from that Alberta Harmmster, to say nothing of Soupot and his drunken confederates, whom she employs. My gorge rises at the very thought of exposing you to danger at the hands of such loathsome scoundrels."

"It is just because things *may* come to the worst that I want to be near you," persisted Odile. "I could never exist miles away from you when your life might be in peril."

"But you will be so excited and distressed if the affair takes a serious turn——"

"There is only one thing," she interrupted,

"that can excite or distress me now. It is the fear that I may not be near you in an hour of danger."

It was when Odile had spoken these last few words, with the quaint note of determination so peculiar to her, that Jacques had given way, with the result that at the point in the narrative now reached the three ladies were with him in the home-speeding train as it neared the Vale of Api.

Jacques had bought copies of all French newspapers *en route,* and found that the Abbé Hans' despatch was very amply confirmed in their columns. The events in the Vale of Api, it was stated, were now matter of the gravest concern to the Government as well as to the public at large. The authorities at Chauny had despatched bodies of dragoons and cuirassiers into the affected district from the cavalry barracks at Compiègne and Noyon. The whole Vale of Api, as far out as the Bois Roux, was practically in a state of siege. The information vouchsafed by these journals extended no further than this. Half the papers Jacques bought were subsidized by the Government, and the rest of them lived in hopes, with the result that all of them gave merely the baldest facts, and carefully refrained from the least word of comment on the nature of the actual

dispute between masters and men. So far as the news columns went, there was no telling how the quarrel had arisen, nor how it was going to end.

Now, strikes at their best—and they are never at their best in France—are a fruitful source of keen personal discomfort to every one concerned. To spare Odile all the disagreeable hurlyburly of hooting and shouting, if of nothing worse, Jacques telegraphed to the Abbaye coachman to await them, not at the Vale of Api terminus, but at Mennesis, a small intervening station, three miles or so out from the town. In this wise they would be able to reach La Ferlandière by the road through the Frières woods without having to cross the industrial battlefield, and also without letting it be widely known that Jacques had returned in haste from his supposed holiday in Alsace.

The station at Mennesis is a tiny erection of the remotely rural French railway type, standing out in the open fields, and entrusted to the solitary charge of a versatile and industrious individual, who has to be station-master, ticket-seller, baggage-master, gateman and what not, all rolled into one. At Mennesis, too, as at a few other French stations like it, these functions were performed by a sturdy woman in early middle life. Jacques knew her well, for

her mother had been one of the old servants at La Ferlandière. Hence, indeed, his choice of the quiet, turf-bordered platform under her care as a port of debarkation. He knew he could count not only on the absence of curious or mischievous spectators, but also on the silence of the whole of the railway "staff!"

The programme worked out well. The train reached Mennesis at five P.M., and the travelers found old Baptiste and the carriage there awaiting them, with one of the maids from the Abbaye on the box. The old coachman stepped forward to greet them with a face that positively beamed.

"It's all right now, isn't it, sir?" he said to Jacques with considerable complacency. "A change for the better at last, eh?"

"What sort of a change?" inquired Jacques.

"Has not Monsieur heard, then?" asked Baptiste, his eyes quite round with wonder.

"I have certainly heard something," Jacques admitted. "But it is a something which leaves me about as wise as if I knew nothing at all."

Baptiste then proceeded to give his version of the affair, as known to the man in the street —or shall we say the man in the stable.

"The factories are dead and done for!" he exclaimed in unrepressed exultation. "There isn't a single pane of glass left unsmashed in

one of them, front or back or middle! And if the buildings themselves were not set in a blaze like so many roaring bonfires, with all their hides—and the hides of the Harmmsters themselves, too—well, all I can say is that the owners ought to stand unlimited "treats" all round to the cavalrymen for coming to the rescue. Half a dozen of the troopers have already been hurt in the scrimmages—yes, there has been no end to the disorder these four days past."

"But do please come to the point," put in Jacques. "*Why* is it that the men have gone on strike?"

"It is this way, Monsieur. The Belgian workmen began the trouble on account of a general order from the management reducing the pay of all the older hands by three sous an hour. Then once the Belgians had come out, all the others followed suit, as one man."

"Yes, but why were the wages lowered?"

"My word!" exclaimed the old coachman, dramatically endeavoring to raise his hands—with a heavy traveling-bag in each—"these Harmmsters wanted to make too much money, and to make it far too quickly! The way they were going on would make a man think they wanted to swallow the whole district in a three years' gulp. People who overdo things like that are bound to come to a smash!"

Such was the earliest circumstantial account Jacques heard, and he accepted it for what it was, a naturally superficial and hearsay version of the true and inner story. He felt sure that he would be able to get the latter from the Abbé Hans, and determined to seek an interview with him as soon as possible. The grim turn events had taken remained still as mysterious as ever in its overwhelming suddenness. Meanwhile he felt some comfort on at least one ground. The war was seemingly strictly localized within the industrial borders that had given it birth. The military would be able to confine it within its proper zone, and *that* was much to be thankful for.

Jacques knew that Alberta was of shrewdness and low cunning all compact, and for all the relief that Baptiste's news had brought him, he was still at a loss to account for her mysterious inaction in not directing mob-violence against his house and home-farm. It must have been so easy for her, he thought. He could even conceive the terms of her inflammatory harangue to her father's discontented employees. "Your wages are being cut down!" he heard her cry in fancy. "Would you like to know the name of the brute who has brought you to the brink of starvation? He is called Jacques de la Ferlandière—your enemy, be-

cause he is *our* enemy, and it is *we* who have to pay you! Down with the aristocrat who would rob the poor man of his bread!" Very swift as the progress of the strike had been, Jacques marveled that Alberta could not have found at least five minutes for a philippic of this kind—or an even hotter one. He was disposed to think that all her time and energies must have been absorbed in combating some new, some unexpected and very powerful adversary. As a working hypothesis, this was sound enough, but who could the other man possibly be? There again Jacques was wholly in the dark. While he revolved these questions in his mind, the carriage rolled easily along through a stretch of tranquil country. There was nothing whatever to give the faintest indication that the firebrands of social revolt were at work a few miles away. The peasants were toiling on calmly in their sunlit fields; hay-wagons, loaded high with their fragrant burdens, lumbered slowly along the road; the carters and wagoners whom the carriage overtook or encountered saluted Jacques and the ladies with unmistakable respect and sympathy. No, the war was certainly limited.

At Odile's request, Baptiste drove very slowly. The girl felt in her heart that she was looking at the loved scenes around her for

the very last time in her life. Yes, for the assuredly very last time! The thought lent a tender wistfulness to her gaze, as the familiar fields and woods and streams now once more greeted her raptured eyes. The knowledge that she would never see them more made her find new beauties in each and every one, and seemed to evoke from them a fond, mute language of farewell. Here, for example, was the One-Acre meadow, which had played its part in the simple annals of her love, on the memorable day of the boar hunt. She pointed it out to Jacques.

"Do you remember, dear?" she said.

"I can never forget," he replied.

The road soon wound amid M. de Chailuy's splendid pastures, where the prize steers and heifers came frisking to the fence to watch the carriage pass. Very soon they were driving through the Frières woods, now glorious in all their summer beauty, where every glade and almost every tree seemed to be whispering messages to the lovers from a past that had gone beyond recall.

And so, through scenes vocal with remembrances, they made their way to the Abbaye, where everything was in readiness awaiting them. Odile was very tired, and Jeanne ac-

companied her and Aunt Bertha indoors. As for Jacques, without waiting even to brush his clothes after the long and dusty journey, he walked straight down the lane to the Curé's house in quest of full news upon which he could rely.

The kind old priest was in his garden, and came forward to greet Jacques, both hands extended in a cordial welcome home.

"How is Odile?" was his very first question.

Jacques shook his head despondently.

"I am so sorry," said the Curé, adding quickly, for he could see that Jacques wished to talk of other things, "I had a good look at my time-table yesterday, and saw that it would be very hard for you to get back here much earlier than this afternoon. But I wired in hot haste for all that, because, really and truly, I was terribly afraid—on your account as well as my own."

"Do kindly tell me what you feared. You see I know nothing as yet."

"I was afraid you might find La Ferlandière and the Abbaye in a blaze, and the poor people there massacred by the mob—a Red Terror all over again, in fact."

"I still don't fully understand."

"Why, when all is said and done, *you,* my dear friend, are one of the chief factors that

have brought about this huge financial smash. I know the whole inner history of it now. I get much of it from Sylvain Potain's niece. She came and told me there was bad work ahead the very day before the rioting began."

"How did she know?"

"She is a servant at Soupot's."

"Come, Father, tell me everything about it. I am more than eager for the details."

Upon this the good Abbé delivered his soul at some length. It is needless to say that the postman's niece was by no means his only source of information for the long, grim tale he had to unfold. He had collected the bulk of the facts, and duly correlated them, in the course of conversation, with as many intelligent local observers as he found available. He now set them forth with considerable feeling and animation, and at times dramatic power.

In what follows the story is thrown into a consecutive narrative form, with only occasional lapses here and there into the Abbé's own vividly descriptive language of epithet and exclamation, as evoked by his hearer's questionings.

It appeared, then, that when the Bois Roux had been sold to Jacques, Alberta Harmmster reached home in a state of mind bordering on frenzy. She left the Vale that night, and had

been practically living with friends in Paris ever since, her appearances at home from time to time being not only very few and far between, but extremely disagreeable to all concerned.

Now, the really astounding financial "boom" of the factories had been mainly due to Alberta's enterprise, which was sustained to a pitch of fierce enthusiasm by her hatred of Jacques, and her hopes of crushing him, to glut her revenge. But from the moment she underwent her cruel rebuff in the auction-room she not only lost all interest in her father's business affairs, but loathed and detested them with all her stormy soul. She could not and would not endure the parental penury that refused her a wretched 50,000 francs at the one moment of her life when she most needed the money. Her blood nearly boiled at the thought that the sum denied was the merest flea-bite compared with the firm's great profits in any one given month on orders which she, and she alone, had procured.

The inevitable feminine logic of it all soon led her to embark upon a vendetta against her grasping father and uncle. She regarded these two as responsible for shattering her dreams of one day reigning in state at La Ferlandière; she held them guilty of condemning her,

in dawning womanhood now, as before in childish days, to a wholly dismal because wholly aimless life. With amazing Oriental confidence in the power of her personal charms, she argued that if a big, handsome man like the Comte de la Ferlandière kept systematically out of her way, it must be because he had graver reasons than his seeming attachment to the fair-haired, consumptive young creature at the Abbaye.

As to the causes of Jacques' estrangement or aloofness—one not in the first instance of her making—she sought and found them in her father's, and especially in her uncle's, outspoken contempt for the young Squire. Stout Victor's foolish pleasantries, she argued, especially his inanities about "the Gaulish chieftain" and "the Count of Potatoes" must certainly have been repeated and possibly embellished in the circles that Jacques frequented. "It was *others* who made him cold to me," the angry, dark beauty reflected. "And the consequence was that, not knowing how things stood, I struck out at him—and *her*—and spitefully tried to buy the Bois Roux. It is likely enough that father and uncle have been working in with each other on a secret scheme to prevent my marriage with a Gentile. Yes, my precious family has balked me of my wish—

my perfectly lawful wish! They are the ones—my prosy, humdrum, hard-cash family!" She became nearly a nuisance to her Paris friends during those first days by perpetually repeating, with bitterness, the inane conundrum of her godless school days: "Where is one happier than at home? Why, anywhere else—yes, everywhere else."

But now her mind was fully made up as to the plan of campaign to adopt, in view of altered circumstances. She now rued bitterly what she deemed her blindness hitherto. She even wondered what evil spirits had possessed her that she had not stood for Jacques against her people from the first. Perhaps there was little use in lamenting it now, but there was no denying the fact: the native energy she was about to utilize in a project of the merest vengeance might just as well have been employed in the past for the attainment of her heart's desire. Instead of wavering and holding back, she could have made her way straight to Monsieur de la Ferlandière and delivered her soul to him, telling him plainly that he was the one man in all this world for her. In short, she could have played to a finish the game so well begun on the night of the official ball. No misgivings assailed her. She felt she was bound to have triumphed. And then—and then—ah, *then*

her race and tribe could never dislodge her from her entrenched position, first as fiancée and soon after as châtelaine!

But now—well, let these people of hers look out for their heads, that was all. They had stabbed her to the heart without mercy. Need they wonder if she stabbed them back—in their purse?

Calmly, coolly, collectedly, she began forthwith her devastating campaign. It was one of much simplicity, and consisted largely in neglecting business and letting things generally slide. But Alberta, to put it most mildly, was sensible of the value of money, and succeeded in diverting a great many important orders from the works in the Vale of Api to the London offices of a male cousin of hers, who had set up in business for himself in England as a wholesale leather dresser a couple of years before, and was now prepared to pay her a most handsome commission on all the export business she could introduce.

The luckless Nathan and Victor Harmmster soon found things coming to a deadlock. On the one hand, there was a scarcity of orders, because Alberta, as we have seen, deliberately failed to ask renewals from the houses which insisted on having French goods, and diverted the custom of others to her kinsman across the

Channel. On the other hand, the rural invasion of the industrialized Vale of Api was growing in geometrical progression. There was an increasing daily influx of laborers from every adjacent commune, all excitedly clamoring, as only Frenchmen can, to be given a job like the rest.

The doomed firm was enabled to hold out for some months yet, and to keep up respectable appearances, with credit unimpaired, by an extremely perilous expedient. This consisted in setting all hands to work in advance on certain future Government contracts which they had been informally but definitely promised, although naturally nothing could be set down in black and white until the time came. Among these dangerous "future deliveries" there was one in particular on which Nathan and Victor quite pardonably built the very highest hopes. This was a huge order for army harness and saddlery, the private promise of which had been made to them by the Minister of War himself and confirmed by his colleague in charge of the Colonial office. It was not so much that the firm stood to reap any exorbitant profits on the deal, but that the granting and fulfilment of so big a contract must afford them a European reputation in military and commercial circles. Indeed, it could not fail to focus

upon them the attention of all important buyers throughout France and her colonies. A vast deal of quite feminine cajolery had been needed to win over the heads of two great "spending departments" in the Cabinet, but the wily Alberta had seen to that. She had even secured the services of other leaders of fashion yet more seductive than herself, with the agreeable result that the contract had been promised to her people in the Vale many weeks before the accident in the auction-room. Neither before nor since were Nathan and his brother let into the knowledge concerning all the thousand and one diplomatic little things that, welded together, make a fulcrum in jobs of this kind. They were well content to give Alberta her head and remain quite comfortably alone in the dark, and at peace—for a while.

For a good long while—which eventually became too long! The weeks and months passed by, and they still heard nothing. Even the official advertisements inviting tenders had not yet appeared in any of the leather trades journals. Stout Victor grew most horribly alarmed, scented mischief in the air, and one fine day he took train for Paris, and hied him to the Ministry of War.

As things now stood the portly junior partner was probably the best of available second-

bests in a semi-political job like this. Less subtle and sinuous than his niece, and even a thought less clever, he nevertheless had made a most useful circle of acquaintances among all sorts and conditions of people in his jovial perambulations through life, as a case-hardened diner out and "society" hanger-on. With the help of these people the shrewd "man about town" had pulled out of more than one very tight corner ere this.

Alas for him who puts his trust in princes! Victor was left waiting a weary while in the Minister's ante-room that morning among numberless others awaiting their turn for audience. It *did* seem hard. Only six short months before, he mused, the Prefect himself had been wont to telephone the Government orders to their chief office in the Vale of Api most amiably, and with an invitation to dinner thrown in or, as the case might be, accepted. Yes, it was very sad, and it was all that Alberta's doing—of that he now felt sure. Poor Victor sat twiddling his hat on the handle of his cane, heaving sighs of extreme exasperation, each one of them an inarticulate but lusty and perhaps not unjustified curse. At any rate, Alberta had done her level best to merit these maledictions.

It was not until more than two mortal hours

had sped that Victor was admitted to the great man's presence. The Minister greeted him in a manner that can only be described as charming—no other word will serve.

"My dear, dear fellow," he exclaimed, "have you been out there all this time? Why on earth didn't you let me know? It is really too bad of you."

"Bad is no word for it," rejoined Victor with a very wry face. "I have been left cooling my heels in the waiting-room for going on three hours!"

"But I didn't see your name down in my list of appointments, my dear fellow, or most decidedly I would have sent for you out of your turn. You will not doubt that for a moment, I am sure."

Conversation began, and the Minister chatted airily, and in one and the same breath about Nathan and Alberta, as though he knew nothing whatever about the coolness between father and daughter. Then, toying with his paper-knife, the man of office proceeded to inform the fuming Victor that the Government hoped with every confidence for the staunch support at the polls of the large working-class constituency which had grouped itself around the Harmmster factories.

"Your folks in the Vale must support the

ministerial candidate as one man," he observed.

"Oh, yes," grumbled Victor, "we are willing enough to do a good turn for Monsieur le Ministre, provided—er—well, provided Monsieur le Ministre can see his way toward doing a good turn for *us*."

"My dear fellow, it is one of our plainest duties to serve our friends. I consider your support as involving a genuine debt of gratitude. Please understand definitely that this Government does not propose to forget, and never will forget, the friends who rally round it."

"And so," put in Victor, "we can still count on the promised order for all those military leather goods—knapsacks, cartridge-boxes, bandoliers and boots?"

The Minister stared at him in considerable amazement.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "*That* contract is settled and done with! Didn't you care to put in for it? I saw no tender from your firm."

"Settled and done with!" echoed Victor, with a ghastly glare.

"Four days ago," said the Minister. "The final papers were signed and exchanged yesterday evening."

"Without one word in the press about it!" moaned Victor.

"Now, come, my dear Monsieur Harmmster," said the man of politics reproachfully, "you must know perfectly well that in the present state of Europe the Government of France is not disposed to advertise in the public press the details of a large renewal of our war stores, to be paid for out of the secret funds! No, thank you! The opposition newspapers have ways and means enough of pitching into us as it is without our kindly providing them with rocks to heave at our heads! However, I must say I am even still more surprised that you did not put in for the contract, because I went to the pains of inviting estimates from your firm in a letter marked 'private and confidential,' and asked you to come here and meet me, together with three of your leading business competitors, who had already submitted very satisfactory offers."

"We didn't receive a line!" wailed Victor. "No, not one single word. And yet we kept the sharpest lookout for such a letter in every day's post!"

"Really? How very unaccountable!" the Minister murmured. His manner was uncommonly detached and calm, however.

"What I have told you is a *fact,*" said Victor gloomily.

"I am free to confess," pursued the other, "that even if your firm *had* decided to hold aloof from this contract altogether, it would not have surprised me in the least, because I have been assured on the highest authority that you are being obliged to refuse any amount of high-priced work of late on account of the enormous pressure of orders."

This was too much. Uncle Victor leaped from his chair and paced half way across the room in a fury. Then turning and folding his arms, he hissed a question at the imperturbable one:

"Who was the unspeakable idiot," he demanded, "who made you believe such unqualified nonsense?"

"Why—everybody," said the Minister vaguely, with an airy sweep of his hand. "You see, our order had to be placed very promptly —in fact, with something of a rush at the last, because the relations between France and one of the Powers are getting more and more strained every day. To tell you the truth, the present contractor was selected from the pick of the competing firms in a single short interview of less than ten minutes."

"I should very much like to know who the gentleman was," entreated Victor.

"I will tell you that with pleasure," said the Minister, "the more so," he added with a touch of well-veiled irony, "because I know how glad you will be to learn that the money has not gone out of the family. It was your excellent first cousin in London who sought and obtained the contract for his branch house here in Paris."

Whereat Victor let out such a ripping oath that Soupot himself would have been proud of it. Perhaps the official sanctum at the Ministry of War, so severely, so departmentally decorous in its color scheme of green and black, had never yet resounded to so eloquent and heartfelt an imprecation.

It was an achievement in its way, and its production lent a rare brick-red to Victor's sallow face like the glow of Etruscan pottery. Then he came to more printable language:

"At the bottom of all this blackguardism," he raved, "I recognize the handwriting of my duly beloved young niece!"

"Do you mean Mademoiselle Alberta Harmmster?" purred the Minister. "What a charming girl, to be sure! But—it seems hardly possible—but—er—am I to take it that there has been some little—er—estrangement between you and her?" All this in the ap-

proved tones of diplomatic compassion—the murmured sympathy which knows all about it and does not care two straws.

"My niece is a young woman," declared Victor with conviction in each and every syllable, "whom I would hang by the neck or drown in the Seine with quite unspeakable joy!"

"Really? Ah, I didn't know," drawled the Minister, readjusting his eyeglass. And then he resumed, more briskly:

"After all, my dear fellow, there is no need to be downcast, you know. There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, and——"

"Thanks," interrupted the other. "I have had quite enough of one queer fish already."

"You will pardon me," rejoined the great man, "but I was not referring to Mademoiselle, your niece; I was speaking of Government contracts. Clearly this last one was an important commercial opportunity which somehow or other you contrived to miss—how or why I confess I fail to understand properly even yet. But you know the Government is in the position of being enabled to put similar good things in the way of its friends almost every three months of the year, and by the by—yes, I am glad I thought of it. The *very* thing!... Dismiss your present disappointment from your mind and tell your brother not to be in

the least upset. The facts are these: When we have got the Budget through, the headquarters army staff is going to draw up a set of new regulations for the cavalry. In the event of the schedule being approved by both Chambers, it will necessitate, among other things, a modification in all existing army saddles. I undertake to procure you this order without inviting any outside tenders. You understand me clearly, I hope? I definitely promise you this order without fail; I shall see to the matter personally, and I shall see that you get it."

"Monsieur le Ministre," replied Victor in tones of languid recitative, "permit me to express my gratitude. It is some comfort for us to learn that we may always count on your good offices."

The Minister shook hands with him effusively, and Victor took his leave and made his way out across the corridor and down the grand stairway, indulging as he went in an almost audible soliloquy:

"I have certainly come a most woeful cropper," he admitted between his teeth. "There is something in the nature of quite exquisitely cool cheek in the way that fellow has just got rid of me, because, after all, to build any hopes on his old saddlery order is about as profitable

a proceeding as waiting for a dead man's shoes. Even supposing the Budget *does* pass, and the general staff *does* draw up its plan for cavalry accouterments and get it through the Chambers, how on earth am I to know that the chap upstairs will still be in office when the time comes? And supposing he is, who is to go bail for it that he will remember anything of his promise? I don't trust him. I even begin to think he is standing in with that Alberta to make it hot for our factories in the Vale."

Indeed, as he mentally reviewed the artfully artless replies he had just received, each one of them so apt a peg for every hole he had made—to say nothing of the Minister's quite overwhelming sympathy of tone—he felt more and more convinced that there had been collusion. "Alberta has got him on a string," was his unchivalrous comment, "and probably others. They are all a low lot."

Then he turned at the foot of the stairs and gave an upward glance at a pair of swing-doors covered with green official felt. They gave private access to the Minister's room.

"I'll bet anything," he said, "that the villain upstairs there must be shaking his sides with laughter at the figure I cut just now! Yes, and for all I know Alberta may have been

hiding somewhere behind a screen in the corner of his room. Grr! you scum!"

The last three words were let out with such venom that the old usher in uniform, dozing on his stool at the top of the staircase, was almost awakened from his mid-day nap.

Victor promptly returned to the Vale of Api with his tail between his legs and a frame of mind to match. The first thing his brother did when he entered the office door was to thrust into his hands a letter, duly signed by the Minister of War. It invited the firm to submit estimates for the contract—the contract which was "placed" three days before the date on the post-mark!

"You can see by the day of the month," said Nathan, "that the post-office has played us a very nasty trick."

"The post?" cried Victor in disgust. "The post-office has had nothing whatever to do with this! You are face to face, my dear brother, with a sample of your daughter's really picturesque infamy. She has evidently left our dearly beloved cousin of the city of London precisely sufficient time to fill up all the items on the bills of quantities so that his papers could be comfortably signed, sealed, and delivered, as they were last night. And mark you, by a perfect refinement of family feeling and

delicacy, he and she have graciously permitted the Minister—who is their tool, of course—to write and tell us all about it just the day after the fair."

Nathan Harmmster collapsed into his chair, and then, in sudden fury, picked up a dagger-shaped paper-knife and thrust it deep into the wood of his desk.

"Alberta, Alberta!" he groaned.

Truly, the gravity of the present blow was such that the manufacturers' outlook was dark indeed. If Nathan and his brother were no longer able to depend on Government support, their present position was simply untenable. Four enormous factories, put up in a hurry by a firm still young in the leather trade, could manifestly not be kept going, with all hands working full time, by irregular orders from private buyers only.

Nathan's mood of sullen dejection departed as swiftly as it had come. He was a man of considerable nerve, who knew his own mind, and his immediate course was clear to him. It was not a heroic one, as neither was it, in the annals of embarrassed capitalists, particularly original. But he deemed it imperative, and so clove to it then and thereafter with the fierce tenacity of a man who will not drown while one spar of the wreck remains afloat. Taking pen

in hand, he dashed off a notice by the curt terms of which all workmen of under three months' standing were dismissed at once and the wages of the rest reduced six sous an hour. About a hundred typewritten copies of this circular were soon struck off by his clerks and pasted up conspicuously in all the workshops, there to greet the men's eyes in the morning.

As might well have been foreseen, there was deep discontent on the part of all hands the following night at "knock-off" time. A trades union meeting was hastily convened and a telegram despatched to the head office of the Leather-workers' Union. Next morning three delegates arrived by an early train from Paris and harangued a stormy general meeting from a window in Soupot's tavern. Yes, the meeting assembled at Soupot's and nowhere else. The café-keeper retained all his old popularity with most of the men, and was now exerting his influence to the utmost against their employers, on the solid if unmentioned grounds that the Harmmsters had prematurely decided, in the flush of full success, to dispense with their fugleman's services. They had told him as much on the preceding quarter-day and stopped his secret subsidy accordingly.

Summing up this portion of his tale, the Abbé Hans remarked with conviction:

"It will not be long before the Harmmsters find out what a serious mistake they made with Soupot. He is a spiteful fellow, that. I think he will be their ruin, or one of its chief contributory causes."

Jacques could not resist one comment on his enemy's metamorphosis:

"I always prophesied that that fellow would turn his coat," he said. "Well, well, so the Jews have stopped his pay! What fun if he got it into his head to take the field for me!"

"There is no fear of that," declared the Curé, with much emphasis. "The wretched man is stooping far lower than that for his revenge, and has become the mouthpiece of the extremists—the revolutionary section of the men. He is openly preaching the Socialism of physical force, and has been flaunting the red flag from a pole on the roof of his tavern any time these two days. The poor men whom he has been dosing so long with his vile absinthe and viler speeches and papers have just been trooping all over the neighborhood in every direction at the heels of one of the discharged foremen, carrying a long broom as a sign of his followers' programme. You will see that broom again. It has become a symbol in these

parts of a labor fight that is going to be fought to a finish."

The Abbé then proceeded to explain how, so far as he was aware, Nathan Harmmster had not been particularly alarmed at first by these violent demonstrations. In Nathan's fairly full career as an employer of labor he had been through a good many strikes before, somewhat smaller in extent, but just as bitter in animus. Moreover, he was absolutely compelled by circumstances to give a flat refusal to his workmen's demands. The creditors of the firm had read all about its impending troubles in the daily papers and had sent in their accounts, with remarkable unanimity, at the beginning of that very week. In the covering letters, too, Nathan's applicants made no effort to dissimulate the anxiety they felt. And then, as invariably in the record of industrial struggles, industrial history began to repeat itself. For nowhere, assuredly, is it truer that misfortunes never come singly than in a war between capital and labor.

"There was a nasty preliminary skirmish," said the Abbé, "the day before I wired to you at St. Odile's. Luckily the Noyon cuirassiers turned up in the nick of time and prevented serious bloodshed."

That same afternoon, however, the Harmm-

ster brothers—most probably on Nathan's initiative—had printed notices posted all over the town, announcing their intentions in the harshest possible terms. Abbé Hans was of opinion that the step was partly due to the natural exasperation begotten in the factory-owners' minds by the unceasing flow of threatening letters which they received by every post—to say nothing of the vigorous verbal abuse bawled over their garden walls. But he also thought they were prompted by a keen desire to sell out and retire from business while the factories were yet unjeopardized. The printed notices stated baldly that "in view of the irreconcilable attitude adopted by their employees the directors of this company will have nothing further to do with a district whose inhabitants have openly demonstrated their utter incapacity to discuss a situation in any reasonable frame of mind. Moreover," the document continued, "these individuals are now endeavoring, at the beck and call of professional agitators, to ruin local industries which have been established for their benefit. Notice is therefore hereby given that the factories are definitely closed down. No hope need be entertained of any resumption of work under the hitherto existing management. All current orders will be transferred to firms in

the leather trade in Paris, and by them executed."

This announcement acted like a bombshell in a powder-magazine. There was a furious explosion of wrath all over the district. Some thousands of workmen, torn from the land—stripped of their love of it, true, but also stripped of their ownership—were made in one moment to feel that they were about to be cast aside by employers who had first dazzled them with golden hopes, and then showed clearly how little they cared for them—about as much as an anatomist cares for the corpse of a vivisected dog.

"When it was closing time at the taverns that night," pursued the Abbé Hans, "a savage rush was made for the factory premises by all the workmen who had just been turned out in the streets. Very naturally they found the iron gates locked, and so they swarmed up on the branches of the plane-trees overhanging the walls, and were just preparing to drop down into the factory yards when fortunately the cuirassiers once more came along at the critical moment. The soldiers had a deal more trouble with them this time. However, they succeeded, and the invasion for the time being was prevented."

"It was a fearful sight," the old priest

added, in a faltering voice. "I recognized a good many men in the crowd who were excellent poor fellows once—day-laborers from Frilleux, small holders from Brésolettes, and old farm-hands who used to have cottages at Fumeçon. There they were, all marching along, mad-drunk with absinthe, singing bloodthirsty songs, with Soupot at their head—the very man who brought all this misery upon them. Bare-headed women were trailing young children after them, and picking up stones from the road to fling at the factory windows. It was like a surging human sea, throwing up the foam from its waves—such wicked, deliberate waves, to be sure—against the wretched buildings they were raging to destroy, and gradually rolling and sweeping forward to the final cataclysm. The soldiers stood firm, with their officers in front. They faced the mob unflinchingly, although both officers and men were most filthily treated by the urchins in the crowd, who took to pelting dirt at every uniform they saw. Yes, whether it was gold braid on the facings or only worsted stripes, it was all one to the street boys."

"In a riot of that kind," the Abbé continued more calmly, "man certainly shows up as an ugly animal, who strains every nerve, in his sheer brute rage, for the stupid revenge that

never effected reform. But what I find especially revolting is the part that woman plays in all our French revolutions—woman, the creature of life, shrieking death at the top of her voice—woman, the being whose highest attribute is tender compassion, fanning up the red embers to a terrible blaze, not caring if she kills those fellow-mortals whom it is her especial mission to love and cherish. There can be no sight so foul on earth as that, if we except its natural sequence—the sight of the child who follows the example his mother has set—the child who raises his puny arm to strike, with curses on his weakness because he can not deal a death stroke. . . . Oh, my poor, dear boy, how glad I am you were away from all this! I have all these dreadful sights burned into my brain and heart, never, never to be effaced. You can imagine what that means to me—or to any priest of God. I somehow seem to feel that I have lived too long."

"What still surprises me," observed Jacques, "is that so very violent a popular rising should have kept its hands, up to the present, off the presbytery and La Ferlandière."

"No thanks to the men's leaders for that," said the Curé grimly. "I know Soupot was most anxious to turn the fury of the crowd

against your place and mine, and to have them both swept away in the same storm of popular frenzy. But everything happened too quickly for his plans; the ground had not been prepared; the attention of the factory hands was riveted on the one main question—the shut-down of the works—and it would have been a very difficult business, if not impossible altogether, to get them to swerve from that into a quite secondary assault on the chateau and the clergy-house—or on aristocracy and superstition, as Soupot and his like would call it. And so it was that I was able to go about the town, much as usual, quietly and unmolested, on the morning of the very day when the first riot took place. With the exception of a very few common young roughs, not one man insulted me. On the contrary, the older men, even those of the sort who in ordinary circumstances would certainly have said something insulting as I passed along, were quite silent on my approach, as though they fully realized the gravity of the situation. A few of them even saluted me politely, and what is more, some others whom I had known in better days, when they were cultivating their own little farms, came up to me in the street and said: 'You will have to say a very special Mass for us this morning, Monsieur le Curé, be-

cause things are now taking a very nasty turn.' "

"So there, my dear boy," concluded the old man, "there you have the situation exactly as it stands. Sylvain's niece has been keeping my housekeeper well informed on all that has happened each day as it occurred. At Soupot's everything is openly discussed by the men as they sit around the tables and drink their beer, and our informant is an extremely clever little girl, who doesn't miss a word of what is said, for she knows—and has known all along—that a warning given in time may save the church and house here, and La Ferlandière as well, if popular feeling begins to turn against them. And now please tell me what you propose to do?"

"I shall make my way down to the Vale to-morrow," said Jacques. "I shall go quietly and unobtrusively, of course, and then see if I can be of service in keeping the peace. I shall arrange, too, not to come single-handed. A small but determined force of able-bodied men can often hold a crowd in check and keep it from going too far if they take united action at the proper time. Do you think there really will be bad work to-morrow?"

"To-morrow will be the worst day of all," said the Curé, sadly shaking his head. "In

fact, I look upon it as the day of all days—the critical day—because Soupot and Etienne have now pinned these Harmmsters down to a definite decision, one way or the other, to be given within twenty-four hours from now."

"Etienne? Is he mixed up in this dirty work, too?" asked Jacques, not without some surprise.

"Yes, poor man. He is always on the side of the strongest crowd in a struggle. Mark this well: there is no more dangerous beast than a sheep in office. However, let that pass for the moment. The fact remains that Soupot, Etienne, and the rest of the men's committee are going to present an ultimatum to their employers to-morrow morning, peremptorily demanding immediate resumption of work, and on the former terms. Since the Harmmsters can not possibly accede to this, it means war to the knife—and to the death. And Soupot wants war. He is putting up for a seat in the Chamber at the next election, and Nathan Harmmster stands in his way. I can not say what will happen to-morrow, but the outlook is black—with hideous streaks of red in it."

"That being the case, I shall turn up on the firing-line," said Jacques.

He rose then and took his leave of the Curé. A few minutes later he was back at the

Abbaye, where he found the two girls awaiting him anxiously. They were naturally eager to learn what had taken place, and he gave them a plain, condensed report, in which, however, he touched very lightly on the Abbé's graver fears. But Odile, lying down on a couch drawn near the table, was studying her lover's face, and reading, as in a book, the true meaning of his guarded words.

"To put it quite plainly," she said, as he rose to go, "there may be some fighting to-morrow?"

"Some fighting?" queried Jacques, with some natural hesitation to speak his mind out clearly on *that* particular point. However, his love of frank truthfulness prevailed.

"Well, yes," he admitted, "there may be a fight, perhaps."

"Will you be there?" Odile asked.

"Odile," he replied, looking fondly down at her, "why ask me such a question? Do you want to hold me back or to urge me on?"

"If it is your duty to go, Jacques, you *must* go," she replied.

"I may have a peacemaker's part to play to-morrow," he said. "I say I *may*—it is only one chance in a thousand, but one not to be missed by any honest man."

Odile put her hand in his.

"If such a thing were possible, Jacques," she said, "I love you more than ever when you talk like that. Go, then, and may God have you in His holy keeping."

The following day broke close and sultry, with such oppressiveness in the air as if Nature herself were ill at ease.

At five o'clock, when the laborers assembled at La Ferlandière to receive orders for the day from the foreman, they found, not Potain, but the Squire himself awaiting them in front of the farmstead, and the news soon traveled from mouth to mouth: "No work in the fields to-day."

Jacques then explained to them what he wanted done.

"Our neighborhood," he said, in the course of a blunt, straightforward little speech, "is passing through a very painful crisis. We have two totally different classes of people to deal with in the Vale. The first is composed of strangers, the scum of adjacent districts, and among them many who are foreigners altogether. I am not concerned with these people, beyond preventing them from doing us harm. The second class is made up of those among our own neighbors, bred, born, and reared in this valley, who made the grave mistake of

taking up factory work, and deserting the good old land that never failed their fathers. These men remain our comrades in the present as in the past. They must and shall be protected, and in the first place they must be protected from themselves, from their cravings after fruitless revenge. We must prevent them from becoming mere tools in the hands of hireling agitators, to do whatsoever dirty work such people may propose. They must be saved from others, too, who find it to their interest that blood should be shed to-day.

"You can now see for yourselves, my lads, that when our countrymen turn their backs on God and the sacred soil of their native land, to become mixed up in shady politics, under industrial conditions controlled by an alien race, we may expect the most grievous results, as we unfortunately do this morning. Now, I want you all to lend a hand to-day as keepers of the peace. At each of the different points that will be assigned to you the men on duty will do their utmost to exercise a pacifying influence around them. And so, I hope, when you get back to your homes to-night you will be able to kiss your wives and babes and tell them good news indeed—the news that the valley has been spared blood-guiltiness, and

that, under God, it has been all your doing, as true-hearted sons of the soil, on behalf of poor comrades who have wandered far astray. One word in conclusion. Let your watchword be Our Lord's command: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Jacques then went around among the men and assigned to each the unassuming patrol duty he wanted him to undertake. This task was the easier that the men knew every inch of the dangerous ground by heart. The general idea was as follows: In the first place, to avert all suspicion, the men were to betake themselves, as if in the ordinary course of daily routine, to the parts of the estate where they had been working the day before. After a reasonable interval they were to make their way, not all at once, but gradually, and in twos or threes at the most, toward the Vale of Api, until they had concentered at Frilleux, where they were to mingle freely with the crowd, but without losing sight of one another. Indeed, both then and for the rest of the day they were to keep well in touch together, however apparently scattered, each of them with his comrades, and all of them with Jacques. Finally, should the latter blow a whistle-call, they were all to rally around him like one man, and act upon his orders.

This scene, so impressive in the still morning air, was reminiscent of a past that many deem dead beyond recall. As of old, the peasantry stood banded together, prepared, with toil-worn hands, to defend from ruthless strangers the hallowed soil where lingered the memories and traditions of ages, enshrined with their forefathers' dust. This time, however, the foe was not any foreign invader in the flesh, but the fatal modern idea that life on the land no longer makes for greatness, whatever it may have done in the past. A dark and deathly idea, truly, and one against which these men were going forth to do battle even as the sun, now flooding the eastern heavens with light, had fought against the darkness and the shadows.

"I may rely on you all, may I not?" said Jacques. "I may depend that every man here will do his duty?"

He cast an eye over the little brigade as he spoke. The question scarce needed an answer. They were a quiet, determined-looking body of men, leal-hearted, straightforward, simple. To them his word, in any just cause, was law, for they regarded it as the word of God's appointed steward. They made him no spoken reply, therefore, but gave him a look which more than amply sufficed.

"Shall we carry weapons?" asked one of the younger men.

"Your sticks and your good stout hearts," he replied.

They then moved away, in compact groups at first, but presently scattered according to their programme, and made for the customary scenes of their daily toil. Each man was furnished by Jacques with the sum of three francs for his mid-day meal in one or other of the Frilleux or Vale of Api taverns. This money left the men a fair margin, as country prices go, wherewith to pay return visits to these establishments about four o'clock or later, if it became necessary or convenient to use any influence thus. Undoubtedly Jacques could feel by no means sure that *all* his men would spend *all* their money on nothing but the good of the cause! However, the exceptions would be few and far between, he thought, and pardonable enough, in view of the tropical heat. But even allowing for a minor lapse or two, of one thing he felt sure. His men were with him in the one great issue—of that he was perfectly certain.

It promised to be one of the hottest days on record, in a twofold sense of the word. By seven o'clock the sun was parching the meadows and lending those slate-blue shimmer-

ing tints to the background which infallibly portend a day of heavy heat and—given the circumstances—of equally heavy drinking. All seemed to be pointing to alcohol and sunstroke.

Assuredly climatic and other extraneous conditions must not be omitted in the history of revolutions. There are days when rioting is simply impossible, and others which render it most likely or even inevitable. Of the latter class—or so it seemed to Jacques as he wended his way to the scene of action—was the day that lay before him. Leaving the Abbaye on his right, and striking into the field-paths that ran parallel with the St. Quentin road, he entered the Bois Roux, and, midway through it, encountered one of the gardeners from the Abbaye. This man, in the goodness of his heart, was joining the La Ferlandière brigade as an able-bodied volunteer. His wife was in constant attendance upon Odile, so that Jacques was enabled to hear the latest news of her. It was none too consoling. She was keeping her room, in a state of prostration and slight feverishness, aggravated, no doubt, by the long and tiring journey and the painful happenings in the Vale, but also, alas, incidental to the normal progress of a disease which advances with such giant strides at the

end of its fatal course. Jacques went his way with a heavy heart and a mind now fully attuned to whatever of sadness the day had still in store.

He set foot in the industrialized region near the toll-gates at Brésolettes. The village seemed somehow no longer itself; it had lost its old-world air and individuality. The rows of thatched cottages still stood there as of yore, with moss-grown walls and eaves, but the glaring great factory opposite seemed to put them out of countenance. It was certainly a most hideous erection, disagreeably resplendent under the pitiless sun, in glaring white distemper, picked out with the reddest red paint. There were human contrasts, too. Some peasants in their workaday blouses were walking along the road, very tranquilly making their way to the fields, like men who had not so much as heard that there was trouble of any kind brewing. But a little farther down there were glimpses of modern slum life, most notably in the groups of slatternly women, with their "fringes" screwed up in curling-pins, and a tribe of unwashed, ill-tempered children squalling loudly at their heels.

What chiefly struck Jacques was that the affected district seemed practically in a state of siege. The cuirassier detachment from

Noyon was bivouacking on the grass at the side of the road, and the troopers were making fires in camp-stoves built of bowlders to cook their nine o'clock soup. Jacques luckily knew their officer, a lieutenant of about his own age, having sold him chargers and made him welcome at the La Ferlandière shooting-parties. They had a few words together, pacing up and down along the lines. The lieutenant shared Jacques' view that simply anything might happen if the Harmmsters refused the committee's final terms, however unreasonable these might be.

"By the by," he added, "you have got in this valley of yours one particular individual whom I would simply enjoy sticking up against a wall, and with a remarkably easy conscience at that. His name is Soupot. This curious person, who, of course, doesn't really care two straws about the working man as such, is doing all he can to incite the crowd to an attack on the factory buildings. Just read this thing—it is an over-night manifesto of his that he has had printed and then poked under all the doors and stuck up on the walls all over the place. My fellows have just been tearing the things down."

Jacques took the crumpled sheet from his hands and read as follows:

COMRADES:

The combination of employers arrayed against you is now given the choice of two alternatives—complete submission or DEATH!

Forward, friends! Forward!

This afternoon, at three o'clock, we ourselves will visit these gluttonous cut-throats, and carry them our final ultimatum!

ALL of you must assemble in your thousands to support us! And if these vampires of the people refuse to disgorge the gold of which they have robbed us, SO MUCH THE WORSE FOR THEM!

Down with the sweaters!

We shall CRUSH them beneath our boot-heels, and then, with our horny hands, break asunder their cash-safes, and help ourselves to the bread which they have denied our children!

WORK—OR DEATH!

Long live the Social Revolution!

(Signed) THE COMMITTEE.

"Only to think," remarked Jacques, handing back the paper, "that this scoundrel is not a working man, for one thing, and has no children, for another. Besides, he was the very man to bring the most desperate pressure on our Municipal Council to have the factories here at all. And the very man, too, who crimped and kidnapped white labor for the Harmmsters and filled their factories with farm hands, on whom he practised all manner of low plots and brazen deceits. It is clear that Nathan and Victor Harmmster have dropped paying him his monthly allowances. Besides, he is standing for a seat in the Chamber."

"Whatever his ambitions," said the young

officer drily, "if I can only crumple him up in a charge——"

"Don't you fret, lieutenant," said Jacques. "He won't be there. He will be directing operations, no doubt, but from a safe distance, entrenched behind his bar. As usual, it is the unlucky working men themselves, egged on by Belgian agitators, who will have to pay the butcher's bill."

"Poor fellows," said the officer.

"Try to be as good to them as you can, will you not?" asked Jacques with a note of deep feeling in his voice. "They are all more or less my own poor boys, and the very reason why I am here to-day is to try to make your duty a little bit easier for you and gentler for them."

Then, pointing down the road to where knots of men were beginning to emerge from the fields to the side of the road—

"Look, lieutenant," he said, "those are my men—my own field laborers. Their first duty here to-day, like my own, is to try to spread counsels of moderation among those of the strikers whom they personally know. Because, you see, in days like these especially, I want to stand by every one who was bred and born in this valley."

He then shook hands with the officer, dis-

tributed some tobacco to the men, and resumed his journey to the Vale of Api.

The desecration effected by commercial "enterprise" lay before him in all its unqualified ugliness. So far as the eye could reach, the once smiling valley was simply shut out of view by ubiquitous, dreary, high walls, from the other side of which the nauseous stench of hides arose in the sweltering air. Tall smoke-shafts were stabbing and blurring the heavens on every hand. To the right, with their backs to the railway sidings, enormous warehouses, an eyesore and an offense in their rectilineal dreariness, stretched over the cinder-strewn, blackened soil, while on the left were chemical and cleansing works, with all that is most modern and mephitic in the way of appalling odors. Farther on lay the yards and works for the main processes of tanning, tawing, and parchment-making, with dye-works attached, and rows upon rows of packing-sheds.

There was not one soul to be seen in any of them this morning. The whole busy life of the place had fled right back to the taverns, to discuss, over pipes and beer, the afternoon's great problem.

In the course of his walk Jacques had to pass in front of the Harmmsters' residence. The latticed iron shutters in front of the win-

dows were all closed, partly, no doubt, to shade the rooms from glare and heat, but also to shield those within from the brickbats, ham-bones, oyster-shells, beer bottles, and such-like amenities of every sort and size that had served on the previous evening as preliminary volleys before the fierce attack that had been projected and duly frustrated. As a matter of fact, both Nathan and Victor Harmmster were not only indoors just then, but standing close up to the lattices and noting Jacques' progress along the street. Very likely it came into their heads that the young nobleman, like their baser opponents, desired to be "in at the death," and had come to feast his eyes on their ruin. Jacques felt that some such interpretation might possibly be put on his arrival by these unfortunate men, and therefore walked somewhat briskly past their house, to lend as little color as possible to their supposition. As he did so, however, the shutters of a drawing-room window were suddenly flung wide, disclosing Alberta in the aperture, very haggard and drawn and care-worn.

Her eyes met his—for the sudden noise had made him look up. There was a glare of hatred on her side at first. But Jacques did the proper thing, and contrived to do it well, considering the circumstances. He raised his hat

and bowed—bowed very gravely, and in a manner that showed him completely incapable of gloating over the dark hour near at hand.

Nathan Harmmster acknowledged the salute, but Alberta was simply dumbfounded with a shock of glad surprise. All the blood in her ebbed to her heart, and she could not make even the faintest sign of recognition or thanks to the man who had now gone his way. But the moment he had disappeared beyond the warehouse at the corner she spoke out her mind in the drawing-room. Nor did she mince her words.

"When all is said and done, that man must love me," she declared.

Nathan Harmmster shrugged his shoulders in pitying contempt.

"In his own way, I admit—which is a rough and countrified way," the girl continued. "But no matter. He loves me, or else why would he be here to-day? Don't keep shrugging your shoulders like that, father. It is hard enough for me as it is not to fling the whole truth in your face!"

"Oh, you can say what you please now," retorted Nathan sharply. "You can even own up to *everything* and make a clean breast of it, if you like."

"Very well, then," said his daughter hotly.

"Here it is for you, then. It is *you,* do you understand?—it is *you* and *you* only, who have caused every bit of this present trouble."

Without deigning to explain this accusation further, she flung out of the room in a state of extraordinary agitation.

On his side, Jacques was at a loss to understand how Alberta came to be staying with her people in the Vale. Still walking on at a good round pace, he found himself wondering if her presence were due to any ignorance of the calamity she had done so much to cause, or—since that seemed unlikely—to some measure of regret for her share in it. It was possible, too, he reflected, that a girl of her type might even take a perverse and morbid pleasure in glutting her revenge to the full, and seeing for herself the explosion of the mines she had laid.

A few minutes later he ran against the presbytery gardener, a retired quartermaster-sergeant, who had just been down to Soupot's to drink an absinthe for the good of the cause, and was thus in a position to give the current explanation of the matter. Alberta Harmmster, by all accounts, had reached the Vale by the last train down from Paris the night before. She had not been accurately informed of the full development of events, although

aware, in a general way, that the situation was grave. Partly, however, from sheer feminine curiosity and partly in obedience to the instinct which, it is said, impels criminals to return to the scenes of their evil deeds, she had felt powerless to keep away. Moreover, she was strangely eager to find out for herself exactly where she stood in local estimation, and also to ascertain the precise results of her abandoning the factories and allowing them to shift for themselves.

Such, at any rate, was the explanation vouchsafed by the *Petit Val,* a new Socialist local paper, which the strike had brought into being. The Curé's gardener was able to throw in some further details, picked up in talk at Soupot's. Nathan Harmmster, it was said, had given his daughter an icy reception, but without any words of reproach. As to Victor, he had genially suggested the propriety of giving some striker a couple of francs to drown her. Alberta had shrugged her shoulders without attempting to defend herself, and then asked for a private interview with Etienne and Soupot, to see what money could do toward stopping the agitation. The precious pair, however—very likely because their movements were somewhat closely watched by the men's other representatives—had not been able to fix an ap-

pointment, however much they might long for its tangible results. All the level-headed residents in the town had been favorably impressed by Alberta's return. It was thought that her home-coming would tend to a reasonable settlement of the dispute. She had made herself fairly popular in the Vale; she was known to be very intelligent; and there was a general feeling that her presence would tell favorably for peace in such conferences as might ensue between masters and employees.

Jacques congratulated the successor of "goodman Adam" on his skill as an investigator, arranged for another meeting with him in the course of the afternoon, and so took leave and went his way. Before very long he reached the far end of the long dead-wall delimiting the Harmmster property, at the point where this latter abutted on the banks of the river Jouine. The luckless little stream, once so dainty a mirror to the unspoiled beauty of the vale, was now a prey to worse than vandalism. Jacques could not help stopping and looking down at it for a while from the center of the new bridge spanning its waters—a highly commercial new bridge, constructed of wrought-iron girders, duly stamped with the name of a foundry near Paris. As he watched the turbid flow beneath, he found it impossible

to conceive how any river could hold more foulness in solution. Putrescences of every kind bubbled up, under the vertical rays of the sun, in a fluid that once was water, but now composed an unspeakable hell-broth, abounding in all manner of disease-germs. Tanners and tawers, curriers and scrapers, dyers and horsehair workers, all manner of folk whose trade it is to free animal membranes from adhering fleshy residues, had for almost two years been perverting the Jouine to the basest uses of their noisome craft. Remembering perhaps only too well the pretty stream that was, Jacques gazed on what it had now become—a happy hunting-ground for bacteriologists. Streaks of sulphuric and other mineral acids prismatically glinted on the surface here and there. Other chemical "by-products" and much miscellaneous offal contributed in the formation of a thick and greasy scum, which turned to a blackish slime when deposited on the foreshore, where it gradually dried in the sun and became a crackling, sticky mud.

While Jacques, still dreaming of old times, stood studying this fair fruitage of a typically industrial Eden, two men stepped onto the bridge and accosted him. Looking up, he recognized them at once as shepherds from the Abbaye.

"We were looking out for you, Monsieur de la Ferlandière," said one of them. "The ladies up at the house are feeling uneasy about you, and want to know the news. They would also like to hear where you are going to take your luncheon."

"Luncheon?" said Jacques with a smile. "True, I had forgotten all about that little matter."

Then tearing a leaf from his pocket-book, and making a desk of the smooth iron parapet, he jotted down some notes of his impressions so far, not forgetting, of course, his interview with the officer and the sensational fact of Alberta's return. Then folding the sheet, he handed it to the shepherd who had spoken first.

"As to where I shall lunch," he said, "I must try to pick up a meal where I can in the course of the day. I haven't time to go on to the Abbaye, because the situation here may quite easily become serious in about an hour from now, when the committee's ultimatum is presented."

"There are a good many eating-houses in the place," remarked the shepherd. "But I don't suppose it would do for Monsieur de la Ferlandière to be seen in any of them to-day."

"There is not the least doubt of that," replied Jacques.

"In that case," said the man rather shyly, "if Monsieur le Comte wouldn't mind, we have plenty of bread and some rashers of fried bacon with us. They are—they are hardly up to the style of the château cookery, of course, but——"

"Why, I shall be only too pleased to share your meal, lads," cried Jacques. "I shall be delighted, I assure you."

They handed him a deep tin dish, well filled with small fried rashers and the skinless, rather rich pork sausages known rurally as *rillettes.* Jacques tumbled a fair third of this mixture on a slice of coarse brown bread. Then he laughed.

"This is all right," he said. "I shall make it up to you the next day I meet you anywhere near La Ferlandière. Don't stay waiting about here now. There is the note to be taken to the Abbaye, and you may also be wanted in the town before long."

The men saluted and moved off, while Jacques found a seat on a convenient ledge and fell to on his primitive but satisfying meal. Then needing something to drink, he took a short cut across the fields and begged the lieutenant for a modest draught from his flask.

"Anything fresh?" the young officer inquired as he complied with Jacques' request.

"Nothing that would particularly interest you," said Jacques.

"Anyway, we shall be mounting in ten minutes' time. The Prefect is coming along by train. Good-by for the present. I shall see you again to-night——"

"Perhaps," put in Jacques.

"Why 'perhaps'?"

"Well, you know, anybody can say how a day of this kind will begin, but——"

"Precisely. I understand you."

And the two young men shook hands with a certain significance, and very cordially.

It was then about three in the afternoon. Ever since their dinner-time some two thousand workmen had crowded around the chief factory buildings, where they were held in some sort of control by a squadron of cavalry, while impatiently awaiting the deputation from the Strike Committee, encharged with the men's ultimatum.

The fiery sun overhead was pitilessly beating down on the closely packed heads of the mob—heads flushed already with the free drinks provided, at the committee's expense, in all the local taverns. As for the paid agitators of the committee, told off for duty in the crowd, they positively reeked of absinthe, as

though their clothing had been steeped in it. What wonder that the whole sweltering assemblage seemed to exhale the aroma of the dram-shop! Not that all, or even most of the men, were drunk by any means. Yet the bulk of them certainly seemed so, chuckling and wagging their heads without any apparent cause, and then suddenly rolling out volleys of abuse, and rolling their eyes in defiance.

Jacques stood aside on their outer flank and chatted with the nearest trooper. While so employed he did not fail to study the situation. His own men, from Fumeçon and the Neigerie hamlets, were all of them on duty, each wearing a wheat-ear stuck in his hat as an unobtrusive but unmistakable token. They were spread along nearly the whole front row of the crowd immediately behind the soldiers, and were obeying orders well, being clearly in a position to close up shoulder to shoulder and advance on a given point at the very first sound of the whistle.

In the rest of the crowd—or at any rate in the foremost ranks—Jacques sought in vain for natives of the Vale of Api. Strange faces confronted him on every side. Completely extraneous elements, too, helped to swell the numbers of recalcitrant factory hands. There were wandering Belgian harvesters, for example,

holding nothing in common but a name with the noble Flemish race; there were ordinary tramps and loafers from the roads; there were even more tattered mendicants, who had spent the night in the casual ward. But dotted here and there were the keener, sharper faces of the Paris agitators, sent down by the International Committee, to be the brains of this unthinking mob.

The deputation still tarried at Soupot's and the crowd was kept waiting an unconscionable time. Quite probably the delay was deliberate, to intensify the nervous strain and tune up the mob, as it were, for any wild, desperate deed. Meanwhile the paid agitators began to strike up "labor" songs, composed of short, telling lines, quite easily picked up and bellowed by a thousand throats at once. The tune was, of course, the *Marseillaise,* and presently the brutal rhymes were being roared with a perfectly appalling effect:

"Tous les bourgeois, on les pendra!
Tous les patrons, on les crèvera!
Vive le son
Du canon!"*

A certain amount of free fighting was already going on in various parts of the crowd—

*"We will hang the well-to-do!
We will scrag the masters, too!
Long live
The cannon's roar!"

small, isolated brush-fires, as it were, which only needed raking together, with a common object in view, to create one general blaze.

The troopers' horses were beginning to fidget, and some of them lashed out with their heels. One flaunting, bare-headed woman, bedizened in tawdry finery, was trampled on the toes, and forthwith emitted a series of ear-splitting shrieks, interspersed with dreadful curses, which were loudly cheered by the crowd. Yet no fury, fresh from hell, could have blasphemed much more terribly. However, the troopers paid little heed to her or to any woman present. What chiefly enraged and excited them was the insulting provocation received from the misguided male section of the crowd. On this, as on preceding days, men kept stalking up and down before them, clenching their fists and daring them to come on, while the badgered cuirassiers could only sit tight and look longingly into their officer's eyes. Their tormenters were of nearly all sorts and conditions, from shambling, long-limbed operatives, the bad bargains, in their time, of half the employers in the leather trade, down to spectacled youths from the packing departments, carrying their walking-canes. Perhaps hardly a warlike crew, yet they kept pushing to within a yard of the troops, yelling out preposterous

challenges. What wonder if now and then a cuirassier's hand came down on the hilt of his sword? It were surely such a simple business, he thought, to make these bawlers cease! Just a blow here and there with the flat—no more. The men's patience, in fact, was pretty well worn out. They had been in the saddle four days, sleeping out at night, and getting their meals as best they could. Yesterday, like to-day, it had been most oppressively hot, and six of their number were already laid low with sunstroke. Yet still, in obedience to orders, they must sit where they were impassively and allow themselves to be pelted with dirt by boys and others who were completely lost to all sense of national honor. And so they glared back at the crowd with eyes that flashed like the swords that might soon be drawn.

"Down with the army!" the agitators yelled. "Down with the slaves! Death to the Pretorian Guard! Death to the accomplices of capital! I say, lieutenant! Get down from that old horse!"

The squadron was silent, after the manner of its kind, with a sort of ominous stillness. This did not extend to the horses, however, who seemed to feel their riders' excitement, straining their necks forward and champing at the

bit as though eager to charge on their own account.

The arrival of the deputation on the scene just then effected a lucky diversion. The delegates composing it came into sight at the end of the long drab wall now shimmering white-hot in the sun, and advanced with all the solemnity of an embassy from a first-class power. There were six of these people all told, clean-shaven, smug-looking persons, all strangers to the place. It occurred to Jacques to compare them to mutton-loving wolves, who had taken to the law, and found fat sheep for clients. In fact, the more he watched them, the angrier he grew.

"The people!" he muttered. "Oh, the poor, common people—the populace, as they say. What a luckless, grown-up child it is, to put any trust in such shifty-looking humbugs! Yet there they are, six utter strangers, with a mandate from the people in their pockets, and the stamp of fluent falsehood on their brows! Were those whom these fellows represent, then, unable to find ten just men—ten honest and intelligent workmen, in all the factories belonging to this firm to discuss the situation directly with their masters? What a grievous farce, to be sure!"

The deputation rang at the factory gate, and then stood attitudinizing in the space kept clear by the troops protecting the Harmmster house, which adjoined the main factory yards. There was a painful pause, and the crowd appeared seized with a feeling of fancy—a half-belief that admittance would be denied. As a result there was an ugly rush and many ominous mutterings. Sections of the mob, on mischief bent, began to wedge their way between the horses in front. Then suddenly, yet cautiously withal, the great iron gate was unlocked and opened ever so little. At last! The deputation entered amid ironical cheers from the crowd.

All present felt that the strike was now entering its critical phase. In spite of the pent-up excitement, a hush came over the crowd and lasted perhaps a quarter of an hour. And then, because the delegates remained longer and longer inside, as if they were never to come out again, the "labor" songs were intoned anew, more vigorously than before. Meanwhile, small urchins climbed up the peeling trunks of the plane-trees by the wayside and stared inquisitively into the factory yard, where, naturally enough, there was nothing whatever to be seen. Meanwhile the murderous stanzas kept rolling, rolling up, like the waves of some stormy sea.

It was as though the individuality of each singer had been merged in one collective and all but impersonal menace. Some resistless power had gripped these men and was whirling them on to an evil goal, unswervingly, implacably——

"Tous les bourgeois, on les pendra!
Tous les patrons, on les crèvera!
Vive le son
Du canon!"

Without warning, dead silence reigned again. The fateful gate had suddenly opened, and a delegate made his appearance. The heat of the day had flushed him much, and he mopped his brow repeatedly. Without speaking a word to any one, he ran off in the broiling sun toward the Place de la Gare, where Soupot's tavern stood, and the men's committee sat.

Quite clearly there had been some attempt on the masters' side to effect a compromise. They must have made a decidedly acceptable offer. The deputation had clearly received an unpleasant surprise. Unwilling to assume too heavy a responsibility, they were sending their man to consult with the Strike Committee, in order that he might come back primed with the "no surrender" war cry which had appeared over their names in all the morning papers.

Now the paid agitators in the crowd felt uneasy all the same. Peace did not suit their book at all. It would be a nuisance, they reflected, if the employers gave way like this. Because, as a result of so disagreeable an event, all salaried agitators must hie them back to Paris, and ingloriously, too, with no more in hand than what remained of the paltry five francs a day so stingily allowed by the committee. A lean banquet, forsooth, and one unworthy of Syndical dreams, instead of the gorgeous feast they had expected, where they might wade in blood and reel in orgy and batten and bloat on their prey. It could not be endured. The bare possibility of such privation must cunningly be forestalled. Events must be hurried headlong; the crowd must be goaded to murderous work, and toppled right over the abyss; the district must be stained by an outrage whose first instigators could never be found. So they lost no time. Long before the envoy could possibly have stated his case and returned, their vehement appeals were shrilling in the midst of the crowd.

"Enough of this palavering," they cried. "We have had too much of it! Let us go for them now! Come along, every man! Now is the time, or never!"

There was a fearful rush forward at once.

So great and so completely unexpected was it that the cordon was broken, the horses were shouldered aside, and more than one saddle was emptied. To make matters worse for the troops, they were left no room to charge. In another second the mob was at the wall, and climbing it anyhow and everywhere, mounting each other's shoulders and scrambling up the brickwork like infuriated human cats. It was all so swiftly done that it seemed as though a dark wave had simply rolled over the wall without any conscious effort. A very dark wave, indeed, whose component atoms were malignly intelligent beings, having power and will to smash and destroy, and even to maim and take life in their exasperation, should any one stand between them and their prey. Verily, red-handed Death was panting in their midst, most greedily espying his tragic opportunities.

Jacques promptly blew a whistle-call and rallied his men behind the crowd. While the cuirassiers, who had speedily formed up again when the first great pressure was relieved, headed off and dispersed what remained of the mob outside the factory precincts, Jacques hastened, at the head of a band fifty strong, right around the outer wall to the rear of the Harmmsters' premises. The back gate opened on a narrow lane leading down to the railway

station. He reflected that this passage was bound to become the strategic point in a very few minutes from now, and posted his men accordingly. The mob, he thought, after wreaking its will in the two main yards opening out on either hand in front of the twin new factories put up the preceding year, would go straight for the dwelling-house where the hapless Victor, Nathan, and Alberta were doubtless wondering what on earth would happen next. Their only chance of safety lay in reaching the lane and escaping to the station, where, all being well, they might jump into the first train bound for anywhere.

In less extraordinary circumstances three mounted men could have easily held this path, which was as narrow as the streets in medieval Paris, where a handful of madcap students sometimes kept the watch at bay for the greater part of the night. But the sudden invasion of the factory yards to either hand completely altered the case. The fugitives were now liable to assault from no less than three quarters at once.

Alone with his men, Jacques listened to the bloodthirsty, drunken bawling and general uproar on the farther side of the enclosure. Then, mounting on friendly shoulders, he looked over the wall and scanned attentively the phases of

the fight, if fight it could be called. The ground in front of the menaced house had now been swept clean of the mob, and was littered with such personal relics as scraps of torn clothing, hats, and heavy walking-sticks. A few injured men, including soldiers as well as strikers, were either seated upon the wayside benches or painfully limping toward them. The mounted squadron had divided into two. The first section was galloping in ever-widening circles all over the open ground in front of the house. The second had entered the factory yards by the unlocked iron gates to take the invaders in the rear.

Most assuredly Soupot ought now to be pleased with his work. First blood had already been drawn. The main body of the strikers had pushed inside the chief factory and were wrecking the central workshops, but a certain number of their companions, taking up a position in the storerooms on an upper floor, were raining down heavy projectiles thence on the troopers in the yard below. The young officer to whom Jacques had been speaking on the road that morning advanced close under the windows to give those within formal warning that he must order his men to fire unless the rioting ceased. He was hooted for his pains. His troopers were watching him intently, and

their feelings may readily be imagined when he suddenly dropped heavily forward, face down, on the neck of his horse. He had been struck on the forehead by a well-aimed iron bolt. The missile was flung by the practised hand of one of the hired agitators. There was no holding the troops after that.

Without a word the men prepared for action. Truly, the one-sidedness of the whole affair had strained their patience long ere this, but the breaking point had come at last. Yet they acted with deliberation, and as though at the word of command. Duly backing their horses to the outmost wall, beyond range of all such missiles as came hurtling from the store-rooms above, they raised their loaded carbines and fired twice into the windows. There was a splash and splutter of lead from such few bullets as went a trifle wide and impinged on the edges of the brickwork, but most of the shots went home, as was evidenced by the screams of rage and yells of pain from within. Some few of the more desperate rioters made an attempt, with a perfectly foolhardy valor, to rush back into the yard and grapple hand to hand with their assailants. But it was far too late for such proceedings now. The cuirassiers loaded, aimed and fired with the unflurried precision of a team at a rifle range. Each

striker who ventured himself in the yard or showed his head at a window was instantly shot dead. The result could be readily foreseen. The cuirassiers' fire was raking the whole of the two lower floors, and the rioters had nothing for it but to bolt from the building as best they could along the side passages leading, at the right, to their employers' private residence. They stampeded thither, accordingly, and in an uglier mood than ever.

Their precipitate flight, as it chanced, made the situation most awkward for mounted troops. It was a slow and most tedious business to follow up the fleeing mob in cautious Indian file along the narrow paved passages between the various blocks of buildings. However, the men were making the attempt when suddenly they halted in dismay. A tremendous jet of flame had suddenly sprung up a hundred feet high in air, with lesser spurts of fire writhing out to either hand like snakes all over the factory roofs. Simultaneously a choking cloud of dense black smoke arose and hung floating overhead, as though to veil the incendiaries at their work. What had happened was perfectly clear. The rioters had fired the petrol stores on the further side of the principal block, and the inevitable befell in less than twenty seconds. Once the spirit took fire, a vast foun-

tain of flame kept soaring, soaring aloft, to redden the sky for miles around, and rain down myriads of fiery flakes on the devoted roofs beneath. Before there was even time to think how help could possibly be rendered, the nearest buildings were hopelessly doomed. Soon flames and smoke were issuing from every crack and crevice.

Nor was it long ere the conflagration threatened the Harmmsters' home—if home it could be called—although the house stood at a good distance from the scene of the original outbreak. The rioters were quick to notice this, and grew frantic with delight. "Three cheers for good petrol!" they cried in every direction —from a safe distance, however, because the troops had now crept a hundred paces nearer and were covering the front of the threatened mansion with pointed carbines. "Bravo! bravo! Smoke them all out! Burn them alive in their holes!"

The comparative safety from mob-violence afforded to the inmates by the presence of the troops was of very short duration. In its manorial days Nathan Harmmster's house had not been overlooked by any other building, but now it was practically hemmed in by a horse-shoe-like row of warehouses. All these were well alight, and the house was being held, as it

were, between the fiery jaws of a pair of red-hot pincers. Eager tongues of fire crept closer and closer, licking at the walls, cracking the windows, and melting the zinc on the roof. And then, for a space, the flames would shake themselves free and shoot up in the murky air, so ruddily, so flauntingly, that they seemed conscious and proud of their strength.

Human dangers apart, it was truly a magnificent and awe-inspiring spectacle. Through the smoke-laden air one dimly discerned the hurrying figures of the rioters making good their escape to the Place de la Gare, now their deadly work was done. Further on the cuirassiers sat motionless on their steeds, chafing in enforced inaction. In the back of the picture a vast motley crowd surged this way and that along the darkened streets and all over the station square. The more keenly inquisitive among them had climbed up the nearest plane-trees to get a better view, while some had secured yet more precarious footholds on top of the tarpaulins that covered the loaded railway trucks, and even up among the rain-spouts on the station roof itself. But whether on firm ground or more or less above it, the strikers, one and all, intently watched their work from afar. And some of them gloated with demoniac glee, while others were saddened at

heart, because never for a moment had they dreamed that things could have gone so far.

With the mounting flames and the pillars of smoke that girt it round about, the doomed dwelling appeared to shrink and dwindle, as though melting away in the heat. Then suddenly some mysterious, swirling movement began on the remoter verge of the crowd, as though an event of yet greater import than the fire were diverting the people's attention. Many seemed to be rushing to a point in the station square, and the troops moved rapidly after them.

A few moments ere this, Nathan Harmmster and his brother, with Alberta and her maid, having found the house too hot to hold them any longer, had crept out into the lane at the back. The air was hot there, too, but it did not scorch and singe, like the torrid blasts within. Moreover, the fugitives hoped against hope that some troops might be there to protect them.

These expectations were unfulfilled. As apart from the fact that the renewal of excitement in the densely packed Place de la Gare demanded the troops' surveillance elsewhere, the officers commanding the half-squadron knew nothing of the door in the lane. It was just a kitchen entrance, of the ordinary, unob-

trusive type, used only by servants and tradesmen. So the hunted four, as they stole into the shadows, were uncheered by the rattle and glint of arms. Instead, they had a glimpse at the far end of the path of a teeming, screaming multitude of their foes, all madly cheering and clapping their hands at the sight of the flames, like children in raptures at a fireworks display. The crowd in the Place was literally hoarse with shouting, and yet the volume of human noises almost overwhelmed the crash of falling timbers and the thud of collapsing roofs, as building after building was gutted, leaving only the stark shells standing erect, amid piles of smoldered ruins.

The runaways cowered against the wall for yet a little while. They knew that their doom was sealed the moment the rioters sighted them—a doom of death, and of death in most dreadful guise—a trampling-out of their lives beneath the feet of a drink-maddened mob, more brutish by far than the commonest beasts of the field. Yet nevertheless their safety lay that way, too. The end of the alley once reached, only twenty or thirty paces across the fateful square would bring them to where the Paris express was presently due to arrive. In the sheltering gloom of the passageway they restlessly roved to and fro, very loth to go on,

yet loth indeed to remain. There was none to advise or aid, and they knew not what to choose—whether to remain and make the most of their pitiful remnant of life or to hazard all on one most desperate chance. The latter now brooked no delay. The train had been signalled, and every instant counted.

While they lingered on thus wretchedly a shrill cry was suddenly heard—and then another—and then several all at once. Certain imps of the street, who had climbed up the lamp-posts to watch the flames at work, had espied the four in hiding. Forthwith there arose a most extraordinary hubbub of questions and answers on the outermost fringe of the crowd—or of that part of it nearest the entry to the lane.

"The sweaters, the sweaters! There they are!" screamed the boys. "Look! There! Just up the little alley!"

Those nearest made a rush in the direction shown. Others, who were further off, followed pell-mell in their wake, scarce knowing why or whither, and thus was produced the eddying movement of which mention has been made.

Nathan Harmmster's face was impassive as a brazen mask, though the lips showed a curl of disdain. His brother looked deathly white.

The poor little maid had given way to hysterical tears, and kept screaming at the top of her voice. Alberta stood awaiting the worst, with her back to the wall, and her clenched hands nervously drumming the stonework. And then two young roughs of the lowest type came lurching up the lane at the double, with their heads lolling forward as they ran, after the manner of their tribe the whole world over. They were a singularly forbidding pair, with the blood-lust in their eyes and on their lips, the slimy argot of the underworld. From where their victims stood, however, their approaching figures were more readily heard than seen, so dense was the smoke and so black the overhanging darkness.

Victor Harmmster produced his revolver and cocked it. Alberta heard the click of the trigger and turned round to him at once.

"The very first bullet must be for me," she said. Then, through set teeth, she added, "I do not want to feel those animals laying dirty hands on me."

"What! Waste a shot on you?" sneered Victor. "No, thanks. You are not worth the cost of the cartridge!"

The would-be assassins were rapidly nearing their prey. Their yells, moreover, were no

longer completely lost on the mass of the crowd behind, and a score or more of rioters were hastening in their wake. Another moment, and all might have ended in blood—in hideous, unspeakable massacre, unfit for description. But suddenly a whistle-call shrilled out its summons, and a man's voice rang in the lane:

"This way, my lads," it cried; "this way! Now then, follow me!"

Without a word a strong body of thick-set, sturdy peasants charged silently up the path. There was no staying them, as the pair of bewildered young ruffians and their rear guard found to their cost. Acting under the young Count's orders, the rescuers fell into a compact, oblong formation, and set the fugitives in their midst. Then, twirling their sticks with the address of men who had seen such service before—on fractious rural fair days and the like—they pushed their way back down the lane. This part of their task was the easiest, for they encountered but little if any opposition from the scared-looking handful of men who had ventured up the path.

They soon emerged at the farther end of the alley and proceeded to force a way through the thick of the crowd. All went quite surprisingly well at first, for the mob fell back and seemed to shrink instinctively, like cattle

who swerve from the lash. It almost looked as though the escort might actually succeed in its effort unchecked, and gain the platform at a first attempt. But the hired strike-organizers pushed through to the scene of action, and not only checked the somewhat general tendency to give Jacques and his men a very wide berth, but incited many of the more ardent spirits to a most furious assault on the rescuers.

These now were obliged to fight their way inch by inch, cheered on by their watchful leader. His words were few. "Keep it up, keep it up," he cried from time to time—no more. The nature of the fighting soon made it convenient to adopt a wedge-shaped formation, like a solid V, with the point cleaving forward through the crowd. The maneuver was of service, but the rioters pressed hard on either flank. Now or never, thought Jacques, there was plentiful need of hard hitting.

"Give them the mill-wheel, lads," he ordered tersely.

The sword or single-stick exercise, which is known in France as *"le moulinet,"* is a vigorous semicircular combination of methodical cuts and thrusts. Fifty sticks were uplifted at the welcome command, and then, after a moment's tense straining for elbow room, were brought

"The would-be assassins were rapidly nearing their prey"
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down whirling with deadly effect, like medieval quarter-staves. Very soon they were twirling with rhythm, freedom, and speed—above all, with much muscle behind them. Many would-be lynchers' heads were broken, many ribs and collar-bones staved in or smashed along all three sides of the bristling human triangle. The gloves, so to say, were now off. Every man who was hit was badly hurt.

"Keep it up, keep it up," cried Jacques, as the merciless "milling" proceeded. His voice could be heard from one end of the square to the other. And every time he spoke Alberta's pulses throbbed.

Thus boring their way, the rescue party cleft the crowd and entered the station gates at last. They had hardly set foot inside the building when the wooden flooring trembled at the arrival of the Paris express, which came thundering in with a muffled roar and a loud screech of escaping steam. Could they only win through to the platform, the hunted four were safe! Very fortunately, if none too soon, some infantrymen, who had been posted to guard the line and the signal-boxes, now noticed Jacques' predicament, and hurrying around, attacked the crowd in the rear.

"Keep it up, keep it up," said Jacques in

steady tones. "Keep it up, keep it up to the end."

With a final effort they gained the heavy door which gave access to the departure platform. The fugitives were then passed through, and Jacques squared himself in the doorway to cover their retreat, with a hand on either doorpost. It would have been literally necessary to walk over him ere one hair of their heads could be touched.

"Down with the factories!" the agitators yelled. They seemed beside themselves with rage when the door was finally slammed and locked behind the last of the rescued four.

The cry fell curiously flat. The fact is that the crowd was now rather at a loss precisely how to deal with Jacques. They had no particular quarrel with him; they were even disposed to admire his pluck, and perhaps feel grateful that, through him, a murder had been prevented. At the worst they might hoot him, as some slight set-off to their feelings.

Meanwhile the agitators kept bawling their shibboleth. "Down with the factories, down with the factories," they demanded. It was rather a waste of good breath, which left every one unperturbed. So the shouters attempted a variant, and called for "Death to the traitors! Death to the man who was bribed!"

Not a soul in the crowd seemed disposed to oblige them, with the result that the agitators, being tipsy with absinthe and drunker still with excitement, adopted one desperate last device to get at the refugees. The way of it was this:

A little way down from the station the only barrier between the railway and the street was a stunted hedgerow, backed by a wooden fence. Once these were climbed or scrambled through, there was nothing to prevent the hired leaders and their henchmen from running along the line and reaching the train before the engine started. The murderous plan was put in hand at once.

When the tail of the crowd began to wheel off, Jacques was quick to note the move, and quicker to divine its object. With his mind made up to prevent it at all hazards, he left half the men, under Potain's charge, to guard the platform door, and made haste with the rest to outstrip the crowd and reach the fence before them.

He was certainly now taking some very serious risks. However, when he reached the palings his diminished force stood round him, still making good play with their sticks, and the crowd as yet held back. But the balance of brief hesitation might topple at any moment,

and then the dead weight of numbers must tell. It was no fault of the hired agitators if all around them lagged. They clamored to make it a lynching there and then. Perhaps what chiefly held the crowd was some measure of inherited respect for Jacques, and all his people before him, not unmingled with a sneaking admiration of the young man's personal prowess.

But it was an anxious moment, none the less, and one of the heaviest responsibility. Jacques realized this to the full, and put up his hand in a gesture demanding silence. It was readily obeyed, for the crowd really wanted to hear what he had to say. Then, standing out before his men, he bared his head with reverence and cried aloud with strong emotion:

"Long live the land of our fathers!"

His peasants behind him cheered him to the echo, and the bold volume of their voices in itself was enough to impress the crowd. But it was really the words that mattered. They went home to the crowd with electric effect. After all, they were a righteous war-cry against the many sins of the factory system.

So the assembled strikers were carried off their feet, and gave cheer upon cheer for wholesome life on the land. "The land, the land!

Long live the land!" they cried, till the Place de la Gare seemed to rock with their bloodless, tumultuous plaudits.

It was all over then—except, as one says, the shouting. The Syndical agents might spare their breath. None listened, for none could hear. Nor did any now care to heed these strangers in their midst. With a single word Jacques had won the crowd—a word that went straight to their hearts and stirred up every dormant memory of older and better days. Neither he nor his had anything further to fear from them.

And so, when the belated cavalry squadron rode back in haste to the some time beleaguered square—after chasing one section of the rioters as far out as Frilleux—there were very few strikers left on the Place, and those who remained were quietly dispersing homeward.

With one ludicrous exception, however. Soupot's tavern, as we know, opened on to the station square. Its proprietor felt hugely aggrieved by the unlooked-for interference of his "aristocratic foe," the Comte de la Ferlandière. Seeking comfort in frequent libations of his own absinthe, Soupot nursed his trouble till it grew beyond control and at length betrayed him into the first rash act of his careful and circumspect career. At the very moment when

the cuirassiers came clattering into the square, the absinthe—or some equally mischievous spirit—inspired Monsieur Soupot to stand on his doorstep and clamor for the blood of the Harmmsters, who were "starvers of the poor," he said.

*"A mort les affameurs!"** he hiccuped with all his might and main.

This demand struck a certain young lieutenant who was riding by just then—a young lieutenant, by the by, with a fine red lump on his forehead—as so peculiarly grotesque that he notified his opinion of the performance with a back-handed slap of his sword. It was meant for no more than an admonitory smack with the flat in settlement of the day's accounts. But the blade went bias, alas, and in the net result Monsieur Soupot and Monsieur Soupot's nose parted company for evermore.

The day's drama was at an end. Jacques started on the way to the Abbaye, at the head of his little band, through scenes of desolation where naught broke in on the stillness save here and there the moans of some wounded man by the wayside. The party took care to avoid the buildings still on fire, because even where these had practically burned out there

*Literally: "Death to the starvers."

was danger from collapsing walls. At one point in their homeward journey they encountered a woe-begone batch of Syndical agitators, in charge of soldiers with fixed bayonets. They were being taken for the night to the *mairie,* now transformed into a temporary prison by order of the military authorities.

Jeanne stood waiting for her brother in the road outside the Abbaye. She had naturally felt most anxious about him, especially since seeing the dense, black clouds of smoke rolling up in the sky beyond the Bois Roux. Simply anything, of course, might have happened, and her relief was now intense.

His first question concerned Odile.

"Poor darling!" said Jeanne with a sigh. "I am very concerned about her. She has had another of those dreadful hemorrhages. I suppose it came on from over-anxiety, although she hid this as well as she could. But she must have been fretting dreadfully all day while you were away among those raving madmen."

Jacques turned very pale when he heard this news. Strong man that he was, whose pulses had scarcely quickened a beat when he faced the dangerous mob, he now drooped his head and walked silently up to the Abbaye.

"Where is she?" he asked the moment they had entered the house.

But it was decreed that for the present, at any rate, he should be spared the pain of seeing his dear one suffer. The crisis had safely passed, and Odile lay at ease on the couch in the studio, smiling her welcome with beaming eyes.

"Oh, Jacques!" she exclaimed, stretching out her hot hands. "My own, good Jacques! I have been praying for you all day long."

Jacques took one tiny hand in his. Amid the deep blue veinings at the wrist the pulse throbbed vehemently—with a sort of insistence, as it were, as though some angel of death were tapping at the House of Life. And then the lover looked down on the slender, pale face etherealized by pain, and into the starry eyes that were shot with heaven's own blue, and upon the rich tresses that gleamed like golden wheat, full ripe unto the harvest.

"Ah, me!" said Odile at length, after hearing him speak a little while. "We have death on all sides of us always. Tell me now, Jacques, where is there a land without dying, or hating, or making war? Where is there a land without sorrow—or where sorrow is only a far-off memory, buried down, deep down in a past that can never be recalled?"

"Odile," he said, sitting down beside her, "I

have seen so many sad things to-day that truly, I envy you."

"And why not?" she said simply, with a radiant, most gentle smile. "Whether sooner or later, our turn must come at last. From afar, death seems very terrible indeed. But God, in His tenderness, knows how to prepare us for it little by little. Even the ordinary course of our daily lives is of service in His work of preparation. Life is *very* sad and weary at times, so that the soul grows gradually ready for the lawful means of escape. Tell me now, Jacques, would you really be willing to live your life over again, if God so permitted?"

"I do not know. Yes—perhaps I might, if I could make sure of keeping close to God all the time, and close to you—walking on between you both."

"The greater the love, the greater the sorrow," she replied. Then pointing to an ivory crucifix that hung on the studio wall—

"Who loved more deeply than He did?" she asked. "And yet they crucified Him. Nay, it was because He was so infinitely loving that they nailed Him to the cross."

Then, turning sideways a little, she bent her head toward Jacques and began talking quite composedly and naturally of many simple things, as had been her wont of old, in the by-

gone, happy home-days, when she was a child and Jacques a grown-up boy. They seemed very happy together, as Jeanne was grateful to note. But when Jacques withdrew for the night she also observed that his eyes seemed reddened at the rims, as though with silent weeping.

CHAPTER XIX

How often and how closely in real life does not Comedy come tripping on Tragedy's heels! It was serious enough, in all conscience, that Nathan Harmmster and his daughter should have been driven from house and home, assaulted by a mob, and only saved from a hideous death by the interference of a comparative stranger. Nor was there food for mirth in the precipitateness of their flight along the departure platform, escorted if not actually carried by the infantry pickets on duty till they were safely bestowed in a comfortable, first-class carriage.

But what was mildly amusing, at the least, was that dishevelled Uncle Victor and the servant were mistaken by the powers on the platform for the valet and maid in attendance, and so suffered to shift for themselves. This they

did incontinently by making a bolt for the nearest available compartment—the one, to be precise, that directly faced them the moment they set foot on the platform. Now, perhaps they scarce realized the fact, especially at a moment when the main thing in life was to keep out of sight and thereby save one's neck, but their place of refuge was the baggage car.

They raised no objections, nor did the worried-looking guard of the train. He was hardly in the mood, for one thing, and he had no time, for another. There were graver things on his mind. From where he stood, keeping a keen lookout, he could see the baffled agitators, unaided by the crowd, yet quite pot-valiant still, running parallel with the line, well ahead of the waiting engine. Their idea pretty obviously was to get through a gap in the fence, put an obstacle on the track, and thereby stop the express—or wreck it, for what they cared. As yet they had not ventured on the line, through respect, without doubt, for the range of the sentries' rifles. Still, there they were, running along the embankment and making certain hooting noises, which the railway company's servants by no means liked to hear. They knew the ways of the agitator tribe. The sooner the express got out of the station, they thought, the better for all concerned.

Besides, the train had already lost much time. At the previous stopping-place it had been held up a good half hour by a telegram from headquarters, while sentries were being procured and posted along the tracks in the Vale. Neither guard nor station-master could feel much assurance that the line might not be tampered with erelong. And the passengers, too, were vaguely ill at ease. They wanted to get on to where semaphores dipped and signal-box needles ticked with something approaching regularity. Wherefore heads were put out of windows, and voices clamored that the train should start at once.

It did—or nearly so. When the fugitives had taken their seats (and stands, respectively), the whistle blew, and the engine went off with a jolt—a jolt that would have cost the driver a pretty penny, by the company's tariff of fines upon employees, if circumstances were different. The train then forged slowly ahead, amid the darkling, empty fields, as if feeling its way at first. But soon it went faster and faster, and presently was bowling along at full express speed. There was lost time to be made up, if possible, so that the service at Paris might not be unduly deranged.

The contents of the baggage car—not in-

cluding Victor Harmmster and his companion —consisted, in the main, of bicycles. Uncle Victor's shins were sorely prodded by many refractory pedals, while lunging handle-bars made dives at the regions surrounded by his waistcoat. This seemed unkind, because Victor was really obliged to cling to an upright post for support, and the task claimed all his attention.

The poor little maid sat down on the floor and sobbed. She had lost her all in the fire—her frocks, her hats, her savings and keepsakes from home—the thousand and one little things that go to make up a pleasant if perishable background in the lives of the wage-earning poor.

The express was now traveling smoothly, and Victor, after just one glance at the outer dark, which made him shiver anew, found time for an unspoken monologue.

"Upon my word," he said to himself, "this has been a pretty close shave! If that beautiful niece of mine could only have been left behind! But no fear—the wriggling little snake! Ugh, she has always the best of luck. People of her sort always do. I am prepared to bet anything in reason that even now, after all the excitement and general smash-up, she is calmly riding first-class on cushioned seats.

In fact, I wouldn't be too sure that she isn't in the dining-car getting over her troubles with the help of some sherry and a biscuit. Whereas here am I getting bumped about in a superannuated cattle truck converted by the company into a traveling bicycle garage. Well, never mind. It only means a little more rubbing up against popular institutions, as they call them—institutions that don't kill this time, anyway. Those brutes in the Vale, though! It hasn't been a lucky Vale for me. What a marvel I didn't leave my bones there! Hard lines, that, at fifty-four, with thirty good years before me yet, and plenty of champagne and good cigars to while the time away."

His thoughts then reverted to the purely financial side of affairs. One thing was abundantly clear. On no consideration whatever would he, Victor Harmmster, of Messieurs Harmmster and Co., continue to do business in the Vale of Api—no, not even if the strikers had spared the two new factories built out near the Frilleux toll-gate. Nor would his brother and partner either, if he knew it. Not one thing could be done by Nathan without Victor's full consent. Now Victor, after the harrowing deeds of which he had been a witness, and actually almost a victim, had only one aspiration left—a desire, a positive yearning,

to go down the vale of years as tranquilly as might be, and as far away as possible from all insane and otherwise offensive persons. He would find him a snug little den, a bachelor's apartment in bright and cheery surroundings, where all chances of intercourse with the grimy unemployed could be reduced to the vanishing point. There would he spend philosophically such income as the strikers had graciously deigned to leave him. After all, he was far from being stranded as yet. Neither that night nor the next would he be compelled to sleep under an archway—"no thanks to my darling niece for *that*," he added with a grunt.

And then he turned to and did some mental arithmetic. Casting up the balance of the day's accounts, he reckoned that, what with insurance money, sales of freehold sites, undamaged stock and—careful man—his own very pretty nest-egg in a certain London bank, he could still put plenty of butter on his bread. Twenty thousand francs a year, he made it. That sum, or its equivalent in English gold, £800 per annum, stood between him and the poorhouse. "Not the wealth of Peru," he murmured, "but never mind. There's many a first-class corpse in Père Lachaise to-night who would be mighty glad to get it."

After making which lofty reflection he re-

signedly squatted himself down on the paraffin-splashed floor beside his weeping companion. Having nothing much better to do, he talked to her like a father.

"Come, come, my girl," he said, "be calm! We must bear up and take these things philosophically, you know, especially in a world like this. You have lost, it may be, about a hundred francs' worth of frills and frocks, which you can easily replace at the very next bargain-counter, yet here you are swamping the car with your tears! Now look at me. I have lost, I suppose, a good two million francs, but that does not prevent me from enjoying my last cigar."

So saying, he struck a match and inhaled a rapturous whiff. Next he made a neat bow of his necktie, which had come undone in the progress of recent events. Finally he dreamily gazed out of the window at the irregular outline of the dark landscape hurrying past. Far down on the lowering sky-line a lurid glow still showed where the Vale of Api lay.

In the first-class carriage, where Nathan and his daughter traveled, the atmosphere was considerably less placid.

Could Alberta Harmmster have obeyed the

promptings of her heart she would willingly have lingered much longer, no matter what the cost, on that peril-fraught journey across the Place de la Gare, the better to enjoy the bitter-sweet, thrilling experience of seeing Jacques fight for her life. It had been so wonderful to know and to feel her indebtedness to him for every breath she drew. They had been fearfully dangerous moments, yet she was pining to live them all over again, had the danger been thrice as great. Ah, if Jacques could only have seen the look she gave him as she brushed between his outspread, shielding hands in the doorway at the station! They were hands within which she would fain have laid her own—indeed, it seemed to the girl that she could and must have done so long ere this had she only been mistress of her fate—had her father not brought her up to thirst for gold and gold alone, but taught her, instead, whatever could be learned concerning those great, true things she knew nothing about as yet, although she clearly divined their masterful effects in Jacques.

While such were her thoughts, her eyes remained fixed on her father. Nathan Harmmster had visibly aged, and sat crouched in a corner seat, bowed down by the weight of his

calamity. Alberta's gaze held more in it of hatred than of pity, and presently the wretched man grew conscious of the cruel eyes that seemed groping in his soul and rendering his tortures unbearable. He looked up suddenly, and then, for a space, each pair of glittering Jewish eyes glared fixedly into the other. It was like the crossing of rapiers before some duel to the death.

"Well?" he said bitterly at length, through set teeth, "are you satisfied *now* with your work?"

"Are you pleased with *yours?*" Alberta retorted instantly. She was spoiling for the fray.

"With *my* work?" he queried vacantly.

"Yes, with *yours,*" persisted the girl wildly. "You say I have ruined your factories. The matter is open to discussion, but never mind—suppose I have, what of it? Some buildings burned, some money lost, some abominable ruffians in a mad, bad temper—why, things like that are the merest scarecrows, to make only the meanest of mankind feel afraid! The brave, the strong, simply snap their fingers at such reverses. Why, even I myself, if only you had stood by me up till now, would be the last to allow my enthusiasm to cool off because the works have been burned down. Far from it—the fire down yonder would have kindled my

enthusiasm anew, and the loss of one great battle would make me only all the keener to make sure and win the next. Yes, so it would, if you had only cared to remember that one good turn deserves another, and therefore tried to do for poor me and my happiness the one-hundredth part of what I did for—your wretched hides, and boots, and shoes!"

She paused for breath. Her father's eyes and his silence said plainly: "I do not understand."

"Oh, yes, I know," resumed Alberta scornfully. "I know you do not understand, and what is more, you never will. Yet I must tell you what is wrong with me for all that. Listen! The red flames that keep burning, burning yonder are as nothing to the awful fires that have been devouring all within me, until now they have destroyed the last of all my hopes. You brought me up for wealth—for that and that alone—and yet you denied me gold at the hour I needed it most. You drilled me in greed, and in nothing else, and now I tell you plainly that money can not serve my turn. I have caught glimpses of a whole unexplored domain within myself, that other girls know all about so soon as they can walk. Have I a soul, a conscience, a heart? It is things like these that matter, and you have taught me

nothing about them. So who are you, then, to reproach me? And what can you blame me for? For having done you harm? But what is the difference between right and wrong, if we have no faith in a future life? The 'right' and the 'wrong' are no more than words—mere farcical fetish-words, to frighten the weak and the foolish, and keep them in their place—or so I thought until I met a man who owes all his splendid manliness to them—or rather to all they mean for him. You know whom I mean—the man who, once and for all, made me realize my wretchedness—the man whose companionship made me feel what a good-for-nothing, dressed-up doll my uncle and you have made of me. And it was against that very man, whom you always opposed and ridiculed, that you lured me into a long campaign, as an ally of base wretches like the drunken Soupot and the contemptible coward Etienne!"

"Why, you were the first to take the field yourself, and you took it single-handed," said Nathan.

"To all appearances," she admitted. "Indeed, it might well seem that I acted only through spite. But no, it was just because I *cared* for him that I fought him so hard. Yes, I fought him tooth and nail because I found it the only way of making him think about me."

Nathan's gesture was one of unmistakable if somewhat vague surprise.

"Oh, I am well aware of *that,* too," continued his daughter sharply. "Of course I know that you find all this a revelation—like everything else affecting me, if it comes to that. But I made this particular revelation to you on a certain occasion once before, only, you see, you forgot all about it. You *do* forget about things, do you not—except when they mean hard cash? Ah, the memory of a five-franc piece is quite secure in your custody, because you have a cash-box instead of a heart—and you can see for yourself to what that has brought you. You have never loved any one but yourself—yes, self, self, self has been the first and the last of your thoughts. As for me, I have never been anything more than a sort of gimcrack in your life, a mere decorative detail to be glanced at now and then and forgotten for the rest of the day. You sowed the seed of selfishness; can you wonder you are reaping the whirlwind of hate? What a harvest it is, to be sure! For you are hated by *all,* from your workmen to myself. But *I* hate you far more than they do. Because, after all, the duty you owed me was your first responsibility. I am your daughter—you have never denied the fact—I am your own flesh and blood. I bear

your name, and yet here you have left me to face my life and all its eager instincts and haunting aspirations unguided and unassisted, without any means of restraining one single evil thought or gratifying a good one—without even so much as the haziest notion of any revealed religion!"

"Why, you wretched girl," exclaimed Nathan, "you are actually blaming me for those broad-minded principles on which I pride myself, and in which I have a perfect right to glory. I left you the fullest freedom of conscience, in order that you might choose a religion for yourself, if you felt that way disposed, as soon as you were twenty years of age."

"What, choose a religion at *that* time of life?" the girl asked in tones of bitterest scorn. She proceeded in volley after volley of breathless declamation:

"A pretty choice at twenty, 'when the girl and the woman meet'—when the fearful struggle begins—when a girl of my type, especially, stands most in need of all the help she can get. At twenty years of age, say you, when I, of all people, ought long before to have had a creed of some true kind well riveted, fastened in *there*"—she brought a gloved hand smartly to her brows and breast—"or rather" (she

added, with a little gasp) "deep rooted right down *here* in my inmost heart, for years and years before. A pretty choice for a hot-blooded girl with a head full of idle dreams and a heart going out to all manner of things that dazzle and blur the eyes, so that you see nothing else for the time, as a moth sees only the candle-flame! To arrange or permit such a choice in the way that you have done is the rankest and wickedest folly. Your obvious duty as a father was to provide me from the very beginning with access to *some* true source of higher than human help, instead of allowing me to drift about, like a spar from a foundered wreck, at the mercy of the winds and the waves. Yes, my life has indeed been a failure, and all that remains of it now is blasted beyond repair. It is all too late for happiness—too late—too late —too late!"

She pressed her hands to her temples and then dropped them in despair.

"My life," she resumed, with a glance through the open window, "is like the darkness you see without—all black—black everywhere, except one ghastly red streak in the distance. And it is all your doing—all your fault."

This was too much for Nathan Harmmster. He sprang to his feet, almost foaming at the mouth.

"How dare you say it is all my fault?" he demanded, glaring down with haggard eyes. "How on earth am *I* to blame? I gave you a good time, a free-and-easy, spacious life—an unfettered way of living."

"And an utterly aimless one," she put in, toying feverishly with the handle of the carriage door.

"An aimless life?" queried Nathan wearily. "Why, what sort of an aim did you expect me to give you, then?"

"Ha, ha!" she began, with dreadful laughter. "You need say no more—not another word. You stand condemned by your own admission. You have pleaded guilty unasked. It never so much as occurred to you, then, to give me anything but an aimless life—which means a life not worth living? Consequently there is no particular reason why I should be alive at all. I have lost my money—your money, that is—or was—your filthy, bloodstained money—I have been hounded out of the one place in the world I love the best—the place where *he* lives—you know who—the place where *he* is in love with that other girl, and she in love with him, and where they are shortly about to be married. I am young, I am pretty, and I might as well be very old and ugly. I find life insupportable without love, and no one loves me—no one has

ever loved me—I am alone, all alone in the world!"

Her voice had risen to a shriek as she spoke the last few words, and her violent nature now flung away all restraint.

"Death, death for me!" she cried, like one crazed with intense self-pity.

Then suddenly screaming, "I will die and have done with it all," she opened the carriage door and leaped out into the night before her father could stop her. The express was traveling at its maximum speed when Alberta made this tragic exit.

Not a word, not a sound escaped her father's lips. There are times in life when the mind feels stupefied by suffering—when the faculties are so benumbed by sheer excess of pain that they fail to respond to the goad of further torment. It was thus with Nathan Harmmster. He sat staring with open eyes at the yawning doorway before him, through which his daughter had vanished, with no better adieu than a piercing shriek. Then the wretched man arose, and slowly tottered toward it, advancing inch by inch, like some timorous explorer approaching the verge of a fearful precipice. One thought kept coming uppermost. Here, surely, lay his plain, swift way out of trouble—by the road which Alberta had chosen.

And so he drew nearer and nearer the door. If he only could muster up courage for one brief fleeting instant, his woes could be brought to an end. He made up his mind for the deed, then, but first of all, with curious racial care, he put his watch and other valuables on the cushioned seat beside him. And then, like some hesitant swimmer, who fain would sound the depths into which he is about to plunge, he stepped down on the footboard, and steadying himself by the handrail with none too firm a grasp, peered forward into the night.

It has been said that the express was behind its scheduled time and that the driver was endeavoring to make up for it. At this particular part of the journey he had a stretch of clear line before him, and was naturally making the most of his chance. The pistons were racing at breathless speed, and the great train whirled through the night like some vast projectile careering in space. Nathan Harmmster's cheeks were buffeted, as by a keen and roaring wind, as he strained his eyes in the direction of Paris. At the farthest distance a tiny point of light showed between the down-line metals, and gradually grew in brilliancy and size. It was the engine headlight of the Paris-Brussels night mail, which had just steamed slowly through the junction at Creil, and was now

getting into its normal speed, as became an international express.

The speck of light grew into a glittering eye, which seemed to hold Nathan in a deadly fascination. The mad panting of the monster behind it and the muffled roar of approaching wheels grew louder and louder every moment. The two trains were rapidly nearing the point at which they would have to pass each other at a combined velocity of nearly two miles a minute.

A few more moments sped. The engines were all but side by side, and the roar of their motion was deafening. The oncoming headlight glared and blazed not a hundred paces distant.

With an appalling cry, which those who heard will hear in their dreams for many years to come, Nathan Harmmster relaxed his feeble hold and dropped under the murderous wheels.

About an hour later a party of railway men with lanterns, who were acting under orders received by telephone from Creil, made an anxious search all along the line, and discovered a girl lying quite unconscious on the slope of a turfed embankment. Beyond a cut on the back of the head, however, she had not sustained any

injuries. But about five miles farther on they came upon traces of a Thing which had better not here be described. . . .

It had once been the body of the miserable Nathan Harmmster.

The theory put forward by the official in charge of the search-gang to account for such different results in the twofold attempt at suicide—for none could doubt that suicide was intended—seemed to carry conviction on the face of it. The idea of this expert—an engineer—was that Alberta had sprung so vigorously from the train as to clear the down-line track and land on the thick, untrodden grass that covered the sloping embankment. Whereas her father, of course, had dropped himself limply beneath the wheels of the night mail.

Victor Harmmster sat placidly drinking a bock in the refreshment room at Creil, awaiting the time when the searchers could let him have their news. He was presently summoned to the station-master's office and asked to go to the telephone. There he found himself "through" to the company's engineer who had been in charge of the search gang, and now was speaking from a point on the line not far from where Nathan was killed.

"Well?" observed Victor, after putting the

receiver to his ear. "They are both of them dead, I suppose?"

"No, indeed," was the prompt and considerate reply. The voice went on in sympathetic tones: "You have still some comfort left in this very sad bereavement. The young lady is quite safe, I am happy to be able to inform you. She has a trivial wound on the scalp, but that is all. The thickness of her hair prevented concussion, and she is not even suffering from shock."

"And my brother?"

"Ah, well, you can imagine what happened. However, he can not possibly have suffered, for the whole of the train went over him——"

Victor dropped the receiver with a clatter and flung sulkily out of the room.

"The little beast!" he snapped, when he got on the platform outside. "I always said she had the best of luck. Yes, that sort of person seems to be *born* lucky. But really and truly, this is a little bit too stiff! Nathan is dead—and Alberta is alive. Well, well. I am hard up now, but I would willingly give a cool ten thousand down if I could have it the other way about."

And he flung away the stump of his cigar on the platform with an air of considerable chagrin.

CHAPTER XX

WHILE Nathan Harmmster's soul was taking flight into the world beyond through the dreadful gates of self-murder, another soul, far lovelier by nature and by grace, was preparing to meet her God amid suffering and patient endurance.

Yes, the hopes that had been cherished by all who loved her of keeping Odile a little while longer in this world were daily becoming both frailer and fewer. The poor child's face was so white and drawn at times that the prayerful watchers by the bedside seemed to *feel* the silent presence of the Angel of Death in their midst.

Jacques knew the secret now; he had solved the sad riddle of Odile's changing moods. At last he could fully understand those swift and mysterious transitions from the intensest joy to the most poignant distress and despair. Her wondrous personal beauty, so perfect of its ethereal kind, had been no more than a veil to conceal the havoc of disease. Indeed, during the past two months the inward ravages of consumption had been such that the doctor referred to them with something like awed surprise, as showing how deep-seated were those

inherited tendencies which had lain so many years dormant.

In the flower of her years, then, Odile was being summoned to pay the great debt which is due from all mankind.

She knew that her end was near, and spoke of it very calmly, as a traveler speaks to intimate friends of a journey that will take him away from them for a longer while than usual.

"What will Heaven be like?" was a question she often asked the Abbé. "It seems to me that for all His greatness, and majestic, infinite beauty, the dear God will not appear so *strange* to us after all, because He has put so much of Himself into every created thing. His goodness and kindness are poured out on the world like the light and warmth of the sun, which sheds a trail of glory on the loftiest oaks in the forest, but without withholding his beams from the tiniest blades of grass. It is God, and no other, who has lent beauty to the flower, and grace to the bird, and sweetness to the smile, and love to the eye, and yearning to the heart. Oh, Monsieur le Curé, how good and beautiful must He be in Himself to those who truly love Him!"

The old Abbé called daily to see her, soon after his morning Mass. Every week, moreover, he brought her, in Holy Communion, the

Friend of friends, the Divine Consoler of them that mourn and are soon to be sundered from all they love on earth. On these occasions Odile's room was adorned with more than usual care.

Not but that at ordinary times her apartment was bright and dainty, and even very beautiful. It had Louis Quinze panels, with a white Venetian figure of Our Lady, and the walls were rich in water-colors, well hung in an excellent light, and interspersed here and there with pretty or curious odds and ends, picked up in the course of foreign travel or of briefer rambles at home. Nothing greeted the eye but was eloquent of the happy years when Odile had basked in the sunshine of early love and bathed her whole soul in sweetness and in light.

But on Holy Communion mornings the combined resources of the Abbaye and La Ferlandière were taxed to the uttermost to render the room more lovely, and thus somewhat less unworthy of the coming of Our Lord.

There are worldly people in France, by the by—and perhaps in some other countries—who are far too fond of a certain irreverent expression when saying that anything has been badly or shabbily done. *"C'est pour l'amour de Dieu,"* they sneer; "it was done for the love

"Mute questionings seemed to arise: . . . 'Why ride you alone to-day? Where is . . . your little bride?'"
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of God." But our young people, in noteworthy contrast to this, were inspired to vie with each other in a generous emulation, precisely *pour l'amour de Dieu,* whenever Our Lord was coming. The most precious tapestries, the rarest vases, the richest of hothouse blooms were all brought forth to do honor to the King of kings, the Giver of all good gifts. When the Blessed Sacrament was borne along the garden paths the old servants knelt down on either hand, and the graveled walks were strewn with ferns and flowers, while the stairway awaiting the priest's ascent was draped in white silk hangings. Assuredly the Good Shepherd might say in His Heart: "I am now among Mine own, because these my children know Me, and prove their knowledge by love."

There were two doors opening into Odile's room, and on Holy Communion days it was usual for Jacques to enter by the farther one and kneel down quietly in a corner out of sight, while the sick girl received the Bread of the Strong. One anguished prayer kept mounting to his lips. It was not so unlike the petition which Odile had made at St. Roch's. "My God," he would say in his heart, "have pity upon us two. Dost Thou work no more miracles now, Lord, and wilt Thou be silent for ever? Yet even so, Thy holy will be done."

For a man of his years and passionate longing of love Jacques bore himself well on these pathetic mornings. He always withdrew with the priest, without speaking a word to Odile, or even seeking her eyes. Having left her alone with God, he would depart on his lonely way with a sense of utter abandonment. Indeed, he felt almost like a stranger, who had just been thrust out of the house. How weary in brain and sick at heart he was, as he rode to La Ferlandière along a road so thronged with memories of the dear, dead, love-lit past! From the figures of the humble toilers out in the fields to the poor thatched cottages by the wayside, where Odile and he had so often met and ripened their love in the service of their neighbor, the same mute questionings seemed to arise: "Tell us, O tell us, why ride you alone to-day? Where is she now, your little bride, our little mistress that was soon to be?"

Arrived at home, Jacques usually shut himself up in his room for the rest of that morning. And often, when the young man raised his eyes to the portrait above his desk, a mist of blinding tears came over them till he could look no more.

But later in the day, toward evening, God seemed to restore Odile to him once more—a tranquillized, loving Odile, far stronger now

than he, and with power to shed an afterglow of tender, heavenly light on his perhaps too human love. So happy were those fleeting returns to the beautiful, short-lived past that Jacques would not have missed a single one of them for worlds. So soon as his morning rounds were done he rode straight over to the Abbaye, where Odile lay, eagerly expectant, like a flower awaiting its daily share of sun. Half lying, half sitting on her bed, with an elbow propped on the pillows, she listened for the sound of hoof-beats till her accustomed ear detected Jacques' approach. Then, turning to her aunt, she would say: "That is *he*"—with a whole world of tenderness in the last little word.

From then until Jacques was actually in her presence her thoughts went out to keep him company. In fancy she not only saw him on the road, but greeted him, too, and returned by his side to the house. That sudden lull in the sounds meant that Jacques had left the high-road and was riding across the meadows that flanked the Abbaye walls. Very soon came the ring of his voice at the gate, as he hailed Baptiste to open it, and then the old gate itself made music on its rusty hinges, as though chirruping a song of welcome. Soon Jacques got down from the saddle—Odile knew exactly

when, because the mare, a sagacious and neighborly animal, used to clatter across the courtyard to the stable by herself the moment her master dismounted. But Jacques, perhaps, did not come up immediately. He was talking downstairs, then, to Jeanne and good Aunt Bertha, or possibly to the doctor, and finding what sort of a night she had spent. "Poor, poor, dear fellow," she often thought. "There is more of the ivy than the oak in his strength these days. He *must* have something to cling to—some little hope, no matter how small, to save him from breaking down."

The conversation ceased and the carven old stairway creaked beneath a well-known tread. He was coming—he was coming—he had come!

At last, then, there he was, and she had him alone to herself. Did he seem rather downcast, as so frequently of late? She tried her hardest to dispel his gloom and sometimes preached him quite a sound little course of divinity, with illustrations all her own. Never, never, she assured him, would he truly be forsaken, because in Heaven each soul retains its individuality and, with that, full remembrance of all sacred human love. Had not Our Lord Himself said: "If a man love not his neighbor whom he seeth, how shall he love God, Whom he seeth not?" Which saying divinely con-

firmed what we know by unaided reason, to wit, that this world were a meaningless and godless riddle in the absence of human affection—a gilded, empty picture-frame, with no sign of the missing canvas, nor any trace of the Artist who painted it. "You, dearest of all dear friends," she exclaimed, "you must really bear well in mind that I shall always be praying for you in Heaven, because God, in His watchful providence, will always make known your wants to me. And so, in that sense, you will always have me *with* you. Only, instead of an ailing, fretful, disagreeable, naughty girl, you will have for your beloved a soul transfigured and refined in Purgatory, and sure not to fall away from God. See now, then, Jacques, I think Our Lord is really spoiling you!"

In matters less directly personal, moreover, she never allowed sad thoughts of separation to cast their shadow over her friends. For example, her innate love of daintiness and order died only with herself, and she saw to it that her room was kept so bright and pleasant that it became the heart of the house. Thus its prettiness was much enhanced in every nook and corner with rich masses of the gay chrysanthemums just coming into bloom. Her favorite music lay on the piano, as though apt to be needed at any time. Her bedroom and the boudoir

into which it opened became unflecked mirrors of a peaceful soul—so great is the power of Christian hope to dispel every vestige of gloom. The autumn sun, streaming in through the windows all the livelong afternoon, lingered fondly on the walls at the sunset hour, as though loth to depart for the night.

One afternoon Odile thought she felt strong enough to read aloud to Jacques from a poem which had much impressed her.

"Please, please do not try," said Jacques, who feared that the effort would cost her too dearly.

"But you do not know these modern verses," she replied. "They are most consoling, I assure you, and will do you a great deal of good. That is why I want to read them to you."

Her voice dropped almost to a whisper as she read the lines that follow:

"Les morts ne sont pas ceux qu'on pleure
Avec des regrets incessants,
Et dont le souvenir demeure...
Ceux-là ne sont que des absents!

Ceux qui partent, l'âme remplie
D'amours par la douleur accrus,
Ne sont point les morts qu'on oublie...
Mais seulement les disparus!..."*

*"No friends are dead for whom we weep
Incessant tears of fond regret,
For, while their memories fresh we keep,
Though absent, they are living yet.

Yea, those who leave us rich in soul
With love by pain intensified
Are no dead names on Memory's scroll,
But live, though parted from our side."

Breath failed her at the last, and she handed the book to Jacques.

"But mind you read it out aloud," she said.

He obeyed—albeit with a sinking heart. Indeed, as a general rule, he made little or no response when she attempted to accustom him thus to the thought of impending separation, or dwelt in words of her own on the inexhaustible comfort to be found in unquestioning faith. He had not yet emerged from that dark night of the soul, when insistent mental torture seems to drown all gentler voices, so that, like Our Lord in the garden, we can only weep and pray, while our Heavenly Father seems to be silent, and our earthly friends are slumbering like the chosen three.

What chiefly sealed the young man's lips was his knowledge of the dolorous pathway now stretching out before him. Indeed, it was a lonesome and dreary journey for which he must gird up his loins. However, he was soon made to feel that the silence of his sorrow was injurious to Odile. His evening visits began to leave her less heartened before the night's ordeal, when, after a few hours' sleep, she suffered like all consumptives. With some effort, therefore, he put away from him all depressing thoughts of the future. The strength of his love made this self-forgetfulness possible, and

even in a measure easy. Very soon he contrived to display by the bedside—so soon to become a bier—a quiet and cheerful manner that was not altogether assumed.

It was thus that he imparted to her, a little at a time, some details of communal gossip. "Monsieur" Soupot had fled the scene. The mayor had been stripped of his office. Minor villains of the piece had duly received their deserts, and so on, and so forth, at some length. There were many small items such as these, but what naturally gave Odile most pleasure was the accounts of Jacques' redistribution, on equitable terms, of all the spare land he had bought among its former proprietors, the petty cultivators who had thrown up the spade in order to get work at the factory. These unfortunate men had been taught their lesson in the costly school of experience, but they seemed to have profited by it. In fact, the outlook, as a whole, was distinctly reassuring. The labor struggle had not very seriously affected any hamlets beyond the Bois Roux, while in the Vale of Api itself the "back to the land" reaction was unmistakably marked, the more so that all the unemployed who still cared for factory work had been obliged to go and seek it elsewhere, in Paris and its industrial environs. Alberta Harmmster was hardly likely to help any

wanderers thither, for she was cutting a tremendous figure at present in the highly fashionable world. So much so, indeed, that the society press was keeping the public informed concerning her comings and goings, with minute and loving particulars of her latest frocks and things, especially her "artistic" innovations in the matter of full mourning.

"But how does she manage to pay for all this?" Odile asked.

"Not out of the factory assets," answered Jacques. "The creditors have hardly realized a bare fifteen centimes to the franc. At the sale, I am told, there were brand-new machines that had cost over 80,000 francs apiece, knocked down for the value of their weight in steel—for the merest scrap-metal price, as we say. A great deal of the rest of the plant, such as boilers, engines, and the like, could find no buyers at all, and these have been left out in the open to rust, in the place where they were put up for sale, the piece of ground at Frilleux where the meadows used to be. The factory buildings are being allowed to stand exactly as they were left by the fire. The most that has been done in the way of precaution has been to put up a wooden fence round the base of the tallest chimney, which has taken to leaning, like the Tower of Pisa, at a most alarming

angle. In fact, a walk through the Vale just now is a rather creepy experience. There is nothing to be seen all over the place but gutted buildings, twisted girders, and iron framework skeletons buckled into all manner of shapes by the heat. All the windows in sight are just yawning black holes, with bullet-marks on the window-sills, and some ugly stains as well, worse luck. Then, of course, one has to pass by the wall of the principal factory yard, where twenty of the unfortunate strikers met with a tragic death—and they were not the worst men in the crowd, by any means. While these ruins are allowed to remain in their present state they may have value as a sort of book, which all who run may read—a book abounding in most serious warnings. However, the young generation now growing up will hardly have much chance of studying the tattered pages, and perhaps this is rather a pity."

"Does not Monsieur Victor Harmmster take any interest in the condition of the property?" inquired Odile. "It all belongs to him now, I suppose—subject, of course, to the claims of the creditors and the most unfortunate shareholders."

"Victor Harmmster does not take the faintest further interest in the matter," replied Jacques decisively. "He has skipped one page

of his life and turned over to the next with the utmost ease and agility. You see, people of his sort do not strike a deep root anywhere. They scour the face of every land as the pirates of old used to scour the face of the sea. However, he has not left France, as it chances. He has sought retirement in the congenial atmosphere of Maisons-Laffitte, and is at present much given, they tell me, to parading his skeptical features and his variegated waistcoats on every race-course within a reasonable radius of his rooms. A hundred years hence there will still be talk in the Vale about these Harmmsters and the rest of the pagan crew whom they brought with them in their wake. Yes, people will be talking then of the mischief they wrought between them. Because, you know, there is no use denying the fact that the Vale will be branded for ever so long with a more or less visible imprint of the work of the past four years. People will come here from outside—quite intelligent and friendly observers, let us say—and they will encounter here and there certain types of physiognomy, certain forms of very low vice, certain smoldering, traditional enmities, handed down from father to son in the home life of particular families, and they will not be able to avoid the conclusion that, once upon a time, there was a godless factory

here. There can be scars on the mind and heart of a community every bit as indelible as any on the human frame—much more so, indeed, for they last so much longer than the oldest of old inhabitants."

"It is a blessing that you are being spared to do what you can," said Odile.

"I did what I could in the way of prevention," Jacques answered with truth and modesty. "And now I shall try to do the same in the way of effecting a cure. I am getting keener and keener on the union of all hearts hereabout in the practices of our religion, and also on the putting of all heads together in defense of rural interests. I want all my tenants to be far-sighted, well-informed men, and consequently the last in the world to be taken in by these tub-thumpers down from Paris. I want to have well-edited, up-to-date local papers, all Catholic in tone, and all keenly devoted to agricultural interests—to those in general, and the defense of village rights in particular. I want to set on foot a local Old-Age Pension scheme, so that the peasant may spend his closing years in peace on the ground which his hands have tilled. I want the peasant to become conscious at last of his strength and of his rightful position in the community, so that he may cease to regard himself as no more

than a vassal of the nearest anemic and corrupt rich town. Ah, Odile, if you were only going to stay with us! If I could only look forward to meeting your loving eyes and hearing kind words from your lips in the years to come, when I shall be getting back home, after a hard day's work, putting all these things to rights!"

"You will be rewarded with something far better than that," said Odile softly. "You will have the merit of offering up this separation in union with the sufferings of Our Lord! Besides, in God's great loving-kindness it is to Him that I am going; I will await you in Heaven; I will pray for you there. God our Father is so compassionate, so infinitely tender, Jacques."

* * * * *

Such conversations as these, in which the possibilities of a happy wedded life were unwisely referred to by Jacques, inevitably caused him the greatest pain. At the same time it were hard to say how he well could have helped his unwisdom. The lives of these two young people were so closely interwoven that there was hardly one of his darling projects for the social betterment of the district which he could broach without bringing in the share that his wife would have had in the work. Hence he was always coming face to face with the reali-

ties of the long separation, so that much brave effort was constantly needed to save him from lapsing into that painful silence which was worse than sad speech to the sufferer, if not, indeed, to himself.

However, relying on God's help, with the surest confidence that it never fails in crises such as these, he took heart of grace once more, and finally, after many a struggle, won out of the slough of despond and became a stronger, better man.

It was well that he did so, because Odile, although valiant now in faith and hope, began to have moments at times when she was fain to lean on his strength, instead, as heretofore, of upholding both him and herself.

One day, for example, she showed some signs of extreme if transient weakness, and the fortitude which Jacques had acquired in self-mastery and prayer was of incalculable service to them both. It enabled him to repay her most amply in her own rich coin of child-like faith and trust. And then, when his spoken words of comfort had had their due effect, he took up a book and read to her, as aforetime she had read to him, some noble pages on immortality, and the life of the world to come.

As he arose to go that evening Odile put out both hands in heartfelt gratitude and love.

"Thank you so much, Jacques," she said. "You are a true friend to me—true until death——"

"And beyond it," he added.

"Yes, true, beyond it, and for eternity."

"It is in God that I love you, Odile."

"And it is in God that I love you, Jacques," she repeated. "When death shall have parted us here, I shall await you on high, in God's most holy keeping."

Jacques left her then with the music of these words of spiritual troth still ringing in his heart. It was a wonderful starlit night. A gentle breeze came murmuring over the meadows, as though the waving grasses were breathing in their sleep. In the forest beyond the tree-tops rocked slowly to and fro, as though swayed by the trailing robes of angels keeping their watch.

"Who knows?" thought Jacques. "Perhaps a bright cohort of blessed spirits has already come down to meet their little sister and convey her to her journey's end."

The thought cheered him as he wended his way down the avenue, so that presently he raised his voice and sang a stave from a Catholic poet's very tender little love-song, which he and Odile had learned by heart in the happy

days gone by. He wanted the sound of his voice to reach her through the night, and help her to be of good heart. It was no serenade that he sang, but rather a prayer put to music:

"Tes yeux sont fermé, mais qu'importe l'ombre!...
J'ai trop de rayons et j'ai trop de jour,
Pour qu'il puisse faire en moi jamais sombre!
Tes yeux son fermés, mais qu'importe l'ombre...
Puisque j'ai l'amour!..."*

As he emerged into the road at the end of the avenue, however, Jacques felt his courage weaken. He knelt him down, therefore, by an ancient wayside Calvary that stood at a bend in the road, and looking up to the darkling, compassionate face above, poured forth his soul in prayer, as perhaps never in his life before.

"Deign to be mindful of me, Lord," he said, "when Thou shalt have taken her away from me. Deign to be mindful of my loneliness, my abiding weariness, my bitterness of soul, and emptiness of heart. Although Thou seemest to be silent, and to make me no reply, I know that Thou art everywhere. I know that Thou art close beside me now—but Thou wilt not speak before Thine hour hast come—Thou, in whose sight a thousand years are as only a

*"Though closed thine eyes, no shadows can affright me,
My heart is filled with light as from above,
Too full for this brief darkness to benight me.
Though closed thine eyes, no shadows can affright me,
For mine is thy love!"

single day. Yea, Lord, Thou beholdest me from yon starry heavens this night. Thou knowest that all is dark within my soul—but this darkness will pass, and a morrow will come, with promise of eternal day. May this, Thy kindly light, soon shine on me, O Lord! I bow my head in love and adoration beneath these strokes of Thy beneficent hand. May my heart, however sorely bruised, keep faithful to Thy love. And may Thy dear, dread will be done. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Some days of intense desolation shortly followed, when both Odile and Jacques seemed utterly abandoned by God, and could find neither solace in prayer nor comfort in each other's company. But the tempest passed at length, and was succeeded by a most restful and gentle calm, which endured until the end. The two friends were thenceforward free to converse in unbroken peace on high and holy things. Most often they spoke of that eternal life which for one of them was so nigh, "yea, even at the gates," and of all that is promised in that blissful land where every tear is wiped away and where there is no more parting, nor sadness of farewell.

"Do not be grieved by what I am about to

say to you, Jacques," whispered Odile some days before the end. "But truly I now feel that I *wish* to go—that I *want* to go home. I can now say with St. Paul that I desire to be dissolved and to be with Our Lord. I would like my soul to make haste and leave this body of death. At present—or so it seems to me—it is fluttering its half-folded wings to be rid of this worn-out case, like a butterfly emerging at length from the broken chrysalis."

"You make me rather afraid, when you talk like that, Odile," Jacques answered wistfully. "Rightly or wrongly—I know not which—I have a feeling that when you go to Heaven and see God face to face—the Almighty, the Infinite Creator, the dear Father of us all—your human love will wax pale and dim, like the flame of a taper in a burst of glorious sunshine. Nay, more. I am tormented by a fear that the lesser flame may be wholly quenched, so that I shall be forsaken indeed—forgotten in this world, with no place in the thoughts of a soul given utterly to the things of God."

"I can *never* forget you, Jacques," she replied.

"And yet your soul will be flooded, or, as the saints have said, inebriated, with all divine delights——"

"One of which will assuredly be to drink

deep throughout eternity of all holy and innocent recollections."

"Yet God in Himself is so unspeakably great and wondrous in His uncreated loveliness."

"But nevertheless He so loved men that He sent His only begotten Son to die for them, that they might live by him. At this very moment, Jacques, as ever and always since the creation, but most especially since the coming of Our Lord and the institution of the Holy Eucharist, God comes knocking at the door of our hearts as though—glory be to His Holy Name—He had great need of us, and were actually begging for a little human love. He is not only the God of His own bright heaven, He is the God of our hearts and the God of our altars as well. He Himself has said it, that 'His delights are to be with the children of men.' How lovable He must find us, after all, with all our pitiful weaknesses and worse! No, Jacques, the human affections which God has inspired and sanctified will live forever in Heaven, not far from the great white Throne where the burning seraphs are gathered. It is only of the *first* place in our hearts that God is rightly jealous."

"Oh, thank you for those words, Odile—thank you again and again."

At length, one bright October morning, they knew that the end was nigh, and Jacques was summoned in haste. Odile had seemed brighter and better for a couple of days before, but the usual reaction succeeded the rally, and she was taken with so sudden and serious a seizure in the night that the doctor expected she would succumb to the next attack of syncope.

Jacques galloped at utmost speed all the way from La Ferlandière, and did not draw rein till he reached the Abbaye gate. Odile heard the furious pounding of hoofs when the mare was some hundreds of yards away, and turned slightly on her pillow with open, startled eyes.

"How fast he is riding to-day!" she feebly murmured. Then, recollecting herself, she said: "He is perfectly right, though." And she added—twice over—"Oh, yes, he is right—he is right."

When he came into the room and knelt down by the bedside her dying eyes lit up with a ray of serenest joy. She turned to the Abbé Hans, who had been anointing her some moments before:

"God is wonderfully good and kind, Monsieur le Curé," she said. "You see He would not let me go without all I love around me. I could never have imagined that it was so easy—so very sweet to die. 'Blessed are the dead who

die in the Lord, saith the Spirit.' How true—but God pours out a yet fuller tenderness of benediction, I think, when He allows His poor creatures to die with all their loved ones round them, uplifting hands of prayer."

Then, calling Jacques closer to her side, she showed him her hands, still glistening with the holy oil:

"Do you see it?" she whispered. "The Oil of the Strong—I shall be very brave to-day—but you must pray for me a good deal presently—when I shall no longer be able to help myself—and then do me the greatest favor of all—have the Holy Mass said for my soul—every day for a month——"

She added a few last requests. All the things in her room must be given to Jeanne, but Jacques must first pick from among the more precious objects whatever he liked the best as a keepsake and loving remembrancer. Then she thanked him again from her heart for all the dear love that had brought her such strength and sweetness. And she added how especially grateful she felt that he had never once stood—no, not for one single moment—between her and her God.

"Because you know, Jacques, dear," she said—a little at a time, but the words need not here be separated—"all true and good and

beautiful things in this wonderful, bounteous world are ultimately God's own gifts. It is He Who is the beginning and the one true end of everything created. We can not get away from that truth, of which reason and revelation assure us. And so, until we have reached Almighty God, we are far from our journey's end. The road that we follow is a road which He has pointed out—but it is only a road, after all. Yes, the world is a world of pilgrimage, and the travelers must find helps and not hindrances in the manifold goodness and beauty they encounter by the wayside. Our knowledge and experience of created things is meant to lead us on to their Creator in mind and heart and soul. We are taught by our contemplation of the world of men and things to lisp and stammer the first few sounds of a language that worldlings will neither speak nor hear—but which God knows how to teach us in full when the hour of pain has come. Do you know the reason, Jacques, why I love you so very dearly? It is because you have always loved me for my higher and better self—for whatever goodness God has given me. You have really been in love with my soul, in spite of the weakness of my body. Other men often use their mastery over the soul of a Catholic girl to turn it aside from its proper path, and make it grow mean

in its strivings, like their own self-seeking hearts. But you did all in your power, Jacques, to uplift my soul, to make it yearn for the highest, for the only perfect ideal—that is, for God Himself. I used to feel so proud of you, dear, whenever you spoke about Him. It is so grand, I think, in these days, to find a man—a young, strong man—who loves the Lord his God, and is never afraid to stand up for Him. The music of God's Name in such a man's heart, and the sound of it on his lips at proper seasons, lends a halo and a consecration to all that he undertakes. Oh, how God will bless you, Jacques! If the cup of cold water that we give in His name can not fail of its rich reward, what a recompense will be yours, dear, for giving Him back without a murmur the one you love best of all! For I *am* that one, am I not, Jacques, as you are my best beloved? And so, dear heart, adieu—the sweetest word of parting ever spoken, for does it not mean: 'I commend you to God?' Adieu, adieu, my dearest, dearest friend!"

She had spoken what is written above in broken, halting sentences, much interrupted here and there by the stress of increasing faintness. But the line of thought was consecutive and clear throughout. She had evidently

meant these words of wise and tender encouragement to abide with Jacques for the rest of his days as a kind of spiritual legacy.

She appeared well pleased when she had bidden him thus farewell. Thereafter she tranquilly gave her whole mind and heart to prayer. Her friends and the faithful old servants were likewise earnestly praying as only Christian friends know how, when escorting a soul to the threshold of a happy eternity.

The goal was now clearly in sight. But suddenly a gentle, most happy smile played over the dying girl's lips.

"Dear one," she whispered to Jacques in all but inaudible tones, "if only you knew how sweet it is to die, with all the dear friends around me!" And then she added, with a glint of tender humor in her eyes:

"Even *she* has come to see me!"

"Even she?" queried Jacques very gently. "I do not understand you, dear."

Odile was unable to speak her reply for the moment, and so, still sweetly smiling, she raised a delicate forefinger and pointed through the open window to the far-spread woods and fields. All Nature without lay hushed and calm beneath a clear October sky of palest blue, that seemed, like Our Lady's mantle, to enfold and caress the world. It was the month of the

Holy Rosary, when the autumn woods are so prophetic of days that are soon to come in the month of the Holy Souls. The whole fair scene was beauteous indeed, but there was a pathos in its loveliness that bespoke the dying year.

"The land of our fathers!" murmured Odile so faintly that Jacques alone could hear. "The Mighty Friend, as we always used to call her!"

The glad smile of olden days illumined her brows as she spoke. Then it faded away, and her head sank down on the pillow amid the wealth of golden tresses that seemed to glow and shimmer like a halo with an almost unearthly radiance.

The angels were now in some haste to take their sister home, that she might shine as another star in the brightness around the throne. From the moment she spoke her grateful goodby to all God's visible world, she seemed to fall asleep, as gently as ever chrisom-child. Swiftly and painlessly her life now ebbed away, and the sacred silence was only broken by the Abbé's unfaltering voice as he recited the Church's majestic prayer, the *Proficiscere:*

"Go forth, O Christian soul, from this world, in the name of God the Father almighty, who created thee; in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered for thee;

in the name of the Holy Ghost, who was poured out upon thee; in the name of the Angels and Archangels; in the name of the Thrones and Dominations; in the name of the Principalities and Powers; in the name of the Cherubim and Seraphim; in the name of the Patriarchs and Prophets; in the name of the holy Apostles and Evangelists; in the name of the holy Martyrs and Confessors; in the name of the holy Monks and Hermits; in the name of God; may thy place be this day in peace, and thine abode in holy Sion. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

She passed away at the closing words of exalted benediction. Her beautiful death was all but unperceived, like the fading away of twilight into the glories of starlit night, or rather like the melting of morning mists at the break of eternal day. Even thus did her innocent soul return to the bosom of the God who gave it—the soul of a Christian maiden who knew that her Redeemer lived.

No sound broke the stillness of the chamber till presently Jacques found a voice that came to him choking upon sobs:

"Farewell, Odile," he said. "Farewell, my sweet—my loving little bride! Thou art now with thy God—thou knowest—thou seest.

Forget not us who are following sadly to the land whither thou hast flown. Forget not those who must strive, in loneliness of heart, with the hardships and the bitterness of the way. Odile, my beloved, my own Odile—farewell."

In these later days, if you happen to be walking by the forest track that winds through Frières, from Mennesis to the Vale of Api, you may chance to encounter a young man dressed in black, engaged in riding slowly here and there, from group to group of peasants, who are felling the trees or tilling the kindly earth. Should his face seem grave for one so young—should the thoughtful gaze seem eloquent of a grief very bravely borne, look well at him again. Perchance you may recognize Jacques de la Ferlandière, who nowadays, in manful toil and service of the poor, is possessing his soul in peace against the coming of that hour when earthly sorrows end, and all true friends shall meet again—the seeming sad, the sacred, the happy hour of death.

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